

CLOSE UP

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AS IS

BY THE EDITOR

German films (Export brand) used to flutter something in the hearts of those who once had vaguely heard that films were art. The flutter persisted long after Germans themselves had seen the decapitated head of their industry whisked off by that Salome (surnamed Hollywood) who upset all conventions, party politics and first tentatives of international concord, by singing for her somewhat gruesome supper like a chirpy, rather undersized and rather ratty schoolgirl. As is usual in cases of insufferable precocity, people said: "Oh, the little one, Oh, the paragon!"—and came to adore.

So the Germans said: "We too shall have a Little One."

And they did.

And his name was Connie-Boy.

Now, I don't think you would ever believe that the theme of a shipload of virgins sailing expectantly to Australia in the 'nineties to be married off by ballot to a pack of males

they have never seen in that *Land Without Ladies**, could be anything but farce.

It couldn't. But, for some strange reason, not one of them saw it.

So here we are. How rude and rough and He-Man the beginning! Here in the *Land Without Ladies*, men are MEN—meaning ferocious nit-wits¹ as usual. To prove it you have to see them enjoying a lynching, all the licking of lips, and all that, in front of a camera that meanders round like a lop-sided and inquisitive old goat.

Contrast with this the tender picture of the cattle-ship—excuse me—the big boat with the ladies, sighingly singing Manchester Spirituals and dreaming, each and every, with her newspaper interview in her hand.

One interview says under the picture, "I want gold". Another wants children, and a third will keep her man happy. You are shown the lady in order to marvel at humanity's blind faith. She has the spiritual conception of companionate marriage, and some poor devil has to have her. But hush! This is our heroine we are thoughtlessly criticising. Covered with blushes, let us return to our camp.

These boys, now aren't they just too happy waiting for the good times coming? Hear us out in front of the screen guffawing away, as we always will, at the barely low-brow, indeed quite browless antics of the fat man scenting woman! And the great big camera keeps turning!

But, look you here, the fat is in the ruddy fire! (We are being He-Man, aren't we?) There's a dame too few! Another ballot, and number 68 becomes the odd man out,

* *Das Land ohne Frauen*.—Conrad Veidt in his first German talkie.

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and number 413 hops in his place. Well, you know who 68 is don't you? Try to guess while I tell you more.

Here's the dock. And *just* look at those boys. And all this dainty flutter and twitter and holding up of cards. Numbers dwindle. The big blue eyes of Connie-Boy grow rounder and rounder, and still rounder.

The animals come in two by two, as of old, and the busy parsons mop their brows. Tobis with a tin-can orchestra makes sentimental noises. Rings strung on spikes grow fewer. At the end there's Connie-Boy, and there's the last bride, one ahead, already married off! And what's to be done?

The fat man in the bar does surely smell. So the lads, in celebrating mood, wash him at least to the waist with soda syphons. Laughter, dwindling to Connie's laughter. They stare at him uneasily. He is good at hysterics. But they have a bereft and clinical flavour amid the other kind of hysteria that is mounting in the audience.

When he is told that he was originally 68, and that 68 has the woman that was rightfully his, his eye says trouble ahead, and 68 is Clifford McLaglen. And the woman is the Companionate, which is perhaps one reason why Clifford is in such a hurry to go off after gold, bearing a camel who has the microphone to himself for the whole of five minutes.

The jealous Connie breaks into the Companionate's room, and is found there, and there's your reason for the Big Scene.

Night and the shadows falling, and the camera now fondly believing in mass-rhythm from choice rather than understanding, the men turn out, and the cry goes forth: "Lynch the . . . (when you say that, smile!)" and Connie is frog-

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marched off to be broken on the wheel, and succeeds in getting becomingly stripped in the process. Someone had heard of "Russian Method," so giant faces, glistening with sweat, grin enragedly into the lens.

Meanwhile, as they say, when they meant a cut-back, the American doctor—who also loves the Companionate, but like a real gentleman, at her request darts in, and using the weight of his presence cries halt. "The man is mad. This cannot go on." And ensues a moving *pieta* with the victim's lolling head supported in his arms. And the great big camera keeps turning!

- Follows
- (1) Connie's return to his white-haired mother.
 - (2) Clifford fighting his companion for the gold they have found together.
 - (3) Connie's recovery, and new job as telegraph operator.
 - (4) The camel putting his foot through the last water carrier.
 - (5) Beginning of sand storm.
 - (6) The exhausted men tottering across the desert leading in this crisis of life and death the camel, which, one understands, is more generally used for riding on.
 - (7) Their reaching the last, outpost telegraph pole, and sending a wire which Connie takes down.

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- (8) Their total collapse.
- (9) Sand whistling.
- (10) Connie realising from whom the S.O.S. comes.
- (11) Torn fragments of S.O.S. falling in waste-paper basket.
- (12) Rain. Torrents of it.
- (13) Gradual recovery of McLaglen.
- (14) Last and first great renunciation-in-favour-of-honour scene between American Doctor and Companionate.
- (15) Return of McLaglen, at last using camel to ride on.
- (16) Doctor's honourable suicide.
- (17) Companionate's escape through back door to doctor's.
- (18) Her return home when she finds out what he meant when he said good-bye.
- (19) Clifford singing to his wife, "The Girl I Left Behind."
- (20) Connie running along the railway track, into the embrace of the midnight express, calling it happily "Eveline".

As for "Connie-Boy", I'm not responsible. Berlin got there first. Why talk of images, of light, of form, of unity, of content and intention, rhythm, montage—all that bunk?—It's dated. There's nothing like that about *Connie Boy*.

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And remember this is Berlin of the New School. You will know what to expect.

Now, as to Berlin of the Old School, if you can bear it any longer, stay with me awhile.

The title is all too suitable.

It is called *The Diary of a Lost One*.

Pabst directed it, Sepp Algeier was the cameraman, Louise Brooks was the star, and Valeska Gert outshone her. If you care for the whole story, sets were by Erno Metzner-Emil Hasler, and Mark Sorkin assisted together with Paul Falkenberg.

Certainly Margarete Bohme's popular romance did not seem ideal content for a Pabst film. You must either, it has been shown, be cynical about a Lost One or sentimental. If you are impersonal simply, you are going to get into trouble with the censor. That Pabst remained considerably so is perhaps borne out by the fact that the film we see is his minus several hundred metres.

It is partly on this account that it does not cohere. However, though not good as a whole, indeed far from it, it does give us some of the finest work he has done. The best is that which deals with the routine of life in a reformatory for Lost Ones. These astounding scenes, dominated by Valeska Gert, have all the epigrammatic wrath, so to speak, that almost Delphic quality which Pabst alone possesses.

The perception that has built these scenes of riotous, monotonous, remorseless speed into one hair-raising, monstrous quietude, has given all that can be given. This is Pabst. A knowledge of minds, of motives, a beyondness of seeing that spills no honey-flavour over what he has to

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offer. There is life—mean, angry, consummately cruel, gay, endearing, triumphant. You either have to swallow it or get up and walk out*.

Here is something complete, and perhaps to itself a masterpiece of cinema. The story is simply the placing of Thymian (Louise Brooks) by family-decree in the Institution, where meals are eaten at a long table, at the head of which, in black and a ponderous crucifix, sits Valeska Gert wearing a look of sadistic benignity and commanding the rhythm of the soup-spoons with a baton. Bang, bang, bang. The rise and fall of spoons offers good rhythm too for the camera and for the cutting.

* The technique of this would require an analysis too involved and too long for the space at my disposal. It is, of course, concerned primarily with immediate plunge to essentials. As long as you are dealing with essentials only—essentials of scenic composition and explicitness, essentials of timing, of incident, of dramatic or aesthetic progression, of utmost visual significance—of image force, in other words; of rigid textural and atmospheric parallel, of psychological mathematics, finding the least common denominator for the utmost individual *recognition*: as long as you are discarding any tendency to fuss, to over-ornamentation, to casual experiment, redundancy, haphazard camera embroidery, uncertainty of dramatic, rhythmic, visual, mental, psychic ultimateness—then you are in possession of the first requisite faculties of a regisseur. Need I say that few possess these qualifications?

That, however, is only the beginning. These things by themselves are only the machinery, the motive force. The operation of the motive force is efficient according to the director's culture, sensitivity and understanding. It stands to reason that nothing can be great that he does not feel as great. The greatest directors forget all these phrases. For mind is better cinema than any screen. They think no more of latent content than any author worthy of the name thinks of his grammar primer. It is the unfortunate critic who remains the grammarian, and the surer his knowledge the greater his assumption. The regisseur and the critic have little in common when each gets down to his job.

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Gert's ferocity might be mistaken for some vague soulfulness, so completely does it rest her. Pabst caught this in *Joyless Street*. At one moment there she leaned on a table, selling Garbo to a butcher, rather dazed and wan and immobile. There was something devilish about it. The same devilishness is here.

After their supper the girls file to bed. They undress in rows beside their bunks. At the top of the room now instead of the table Gert now presides with a gong instead of a baton. Bang, bang, bang. Every stroke a movement—every movement rhythm, every rhythm a new camera analysis. Gathering tempo. Speed, riot, some demented ritual. Sweat bursts from her forehead. Eyes flashing vulturine and ecstatic.

Lights out mean a furtive candle. At last there is a natural re-grouping. Thymian's friend, Erika, jumps up and sits on her bed. The Diary of the Lost One is brought out and they discuss it. Erika's ankle swings, making a natural handle to be grasped, and the gleaming face of the Gert makes a suitable target to be kicked with it. There is a moment's panic. Out goes the candle. In the dark a scamper for the Diary. Chased by Gert, tossed like a ball from girl to girl.

Rebellion begun, takes flame. The tyrant is seized, pummelled, mobbed. Her face howls from the screen. With the gong, on a topmost bed a girl beats out a joyous tempo for the punishment. Erika now has seized the keys and signing to Thymian, the two escape unseen. Bang, bang, bang. The punishment grows wolfish. The audience roars and stamps participation.

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Pabst's camera is like a busy eye. It plucks at a million details. Not here and there, dissociated parallels or comments—sheer avid detail builds a raging, intimate riot; one vast co-ordination—conditioned-reflex, if you like. You have been bullied in that house, you have sat in your seat unable to help, and at last you are freed, and you fight, and when the gong beats over all, you stamp and cheer, you are part of the torrent of fists and falling bodies.

That is Pabst as I know him. That is cinema as I know it. And because of it, the film is important. But now, the other aspects.

(1) There is a specious and irrelevant sequence of low comedy in which Sigfried Arno in a false beard spoils the screen for nearly ten minutes. It was not funny, nor bawdy, but false as the beard he wore, and had no place in narrative, in time or space. I cannot imagine why it was not cut entirely out.

(2) If you are dealing with a Lost One, either you must deal with her or leave her alone. It doesn't make an atom of difference that she faints each time she is about to get what's coming to her—and faint she does, four times, and if that's not excessive, spare me from something that is. Indeed, on one occasion, when she faints while dancing and is waltzed by her partner through a suite of rooms and literally on to the bed, there is simply nothing to be done about it. The most avid spectator could hardly bother to go on looking for so long.

(3) The story is worthless. It points nothing, except a finger of wrath and scorn at the Institution, as such, and at

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the lower middle class family life which supports, and in consequence, fills such places; and this would be quite enough if it were a theme, but it is only an incident—one of Pabst's few chances to state something, and state it he does. The rest is the decay of a young woman who does not, in fact decay, but remains as charming in the end as she was in her confirmation dress. In any event, the life of a Fallen One, as such, is surely of interest only to very young people who are not sure of exactly what it implies.

The reader will gather that it was a very uneven film. It was. Louise Brooks looked beautiful enough, but she had nothing to do. She did cry once, some rather collegiate, sophomore tears, but they were not the kind of tears they were meant to be. Laurels go to Valeska Gert. To Fritz Rasp and to Sybille Schmitz, who had a small part in the beginning and was quite wonderful in it. I would, myself, have given her the leading rôle. She would have been much better.

This is the material Pabst is given. And he is one of the few masters of the screen. Of course, if he were given material worthy of his talents, it would inevitably be censored.

This gives me an idea for a film plot. Let us take a story, some rather sexy story, and let us have two directors each deciding how to make the film. Let one construct with an eye to the censor, and the other with honest, explicit truthfulness. Show the results in parallel, scene by scene, and watch which the censor rejects.

There's a capital scenario. But of course, it would be censored.

KENNETH MACPHERSON.

MECHANISMS OF CINEMA

(Continued).

When each new development of cinematography is technically perfected, its "trick" aspect is exploited.

Somebody has said this before, still, it is so important to my theory propounded in a previous *Close Up*, that here it is again.

Mechanisms of cinema—in the abstract sense—retain a significance for us when the "trick" novelty has worn off.

* * *

In general an identity theorem is almost axiomatic . . . and is an evident-proposition which, like the exasperations of Euclid, bears a purely intuitive truth difficult in the extreme of logical proof. In fact to prove something I feel intuitively is true, IS TRUE, is very often far more trying than the proof of something not so superficially self-evident.

So I felt when I wrote "The Film in Relation to the Unconscious" and started off with the (summarised) statement:—*the content of cinema is visually excited mass-fantasy, having two planes of psychic activity—the conscious and the unconscious—between which is interposed a set of psychic-visual mechanisms identical with those of the Freudian Dream Theory.*

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This is my identity theorem.

Technical developments pass through the trick stage, and emerge as "technique".

Let us revert to this discussion for a brief space.

* * *

Although technically spontaneous, the material of a dream is drawn from the Unconscious, therefore its latent sources are unknown to the dreamer . . . exactly like the work of someone else.

We go to see the "work" of others and call it "cinema" . . . are moved quite irrationally to pleasure, or fear, and most of the emotions springing from these.

When we have learnt that these "irrational" emotions are those of another fellow using the same body and nervous system as our own, we are on the road to a right understanding of one of the outstanding wonders of conscious life. Impressionism in its fullest development, is what I call it . . . and the "other fellow" is the scenario artist.

In this connection I have something to analyse if it is not rather late . . . *La Marche des Machines* . . . the only abstract I have seen.

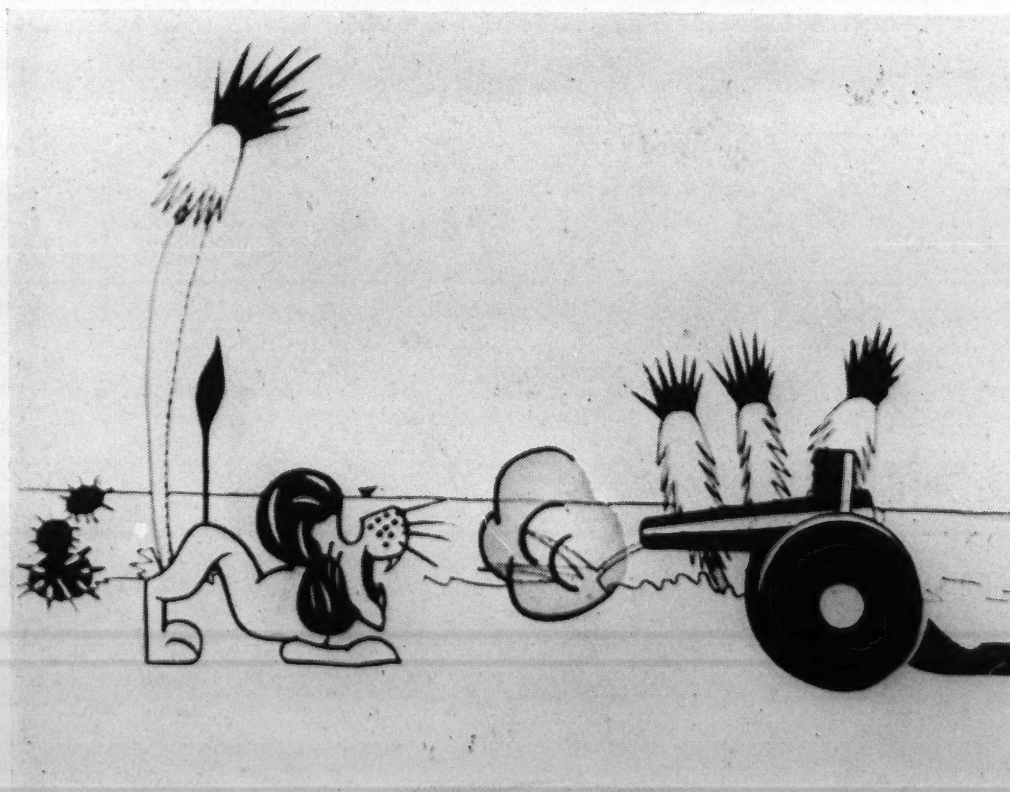
* * *

Deslaw is difficult to follow . . . so start with me at the beginning. I wanted to understand him and this is how I interpret his work :—

A sheaf of railway lines flying towards me . . . railway lines which become only *lines* in the abstract because they are no longer like any railway lines I have seen . . . they are above my head ! I feel I am rapidly approaching somewhere until I am shocked by a second dimension of motion . . . a



From a Soviet animated cartoon film by H. Ivanoff's group for Sovkino.





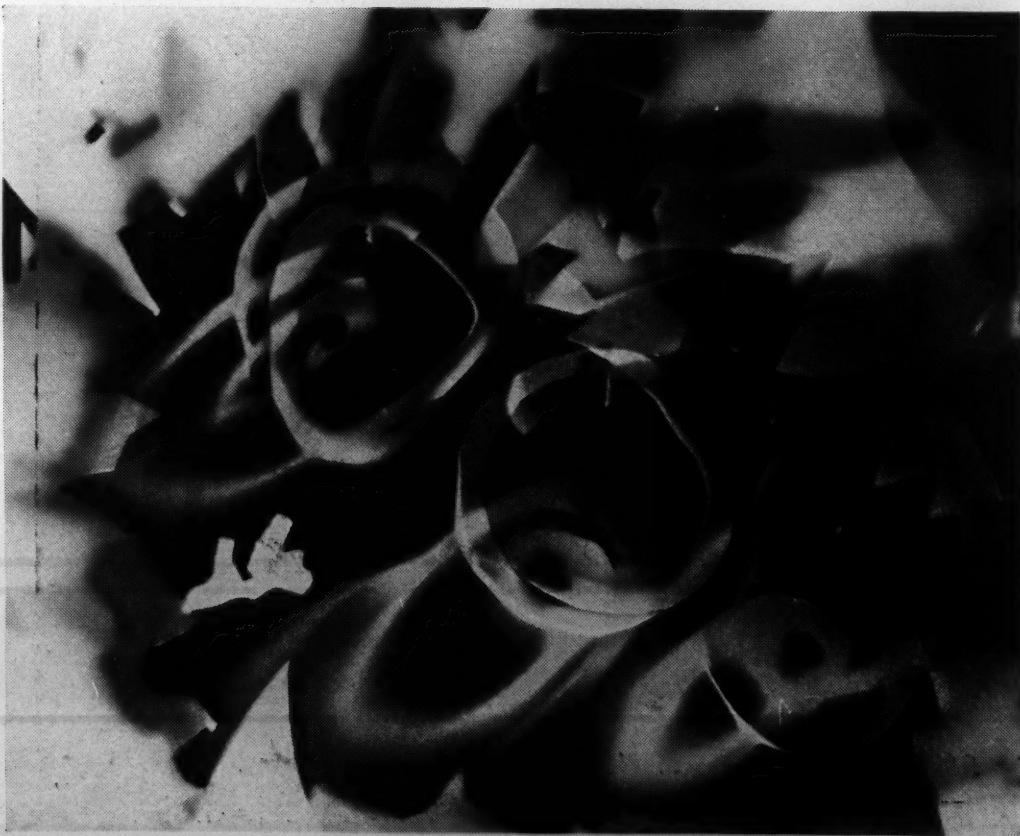
The Stump of an Empire (See article in this issue), a new Sovkino (Leningrad) film, directed by Ermiler, which the Russians call their "All Quiet on the Western Front."——Death and crucifixion on the front line.



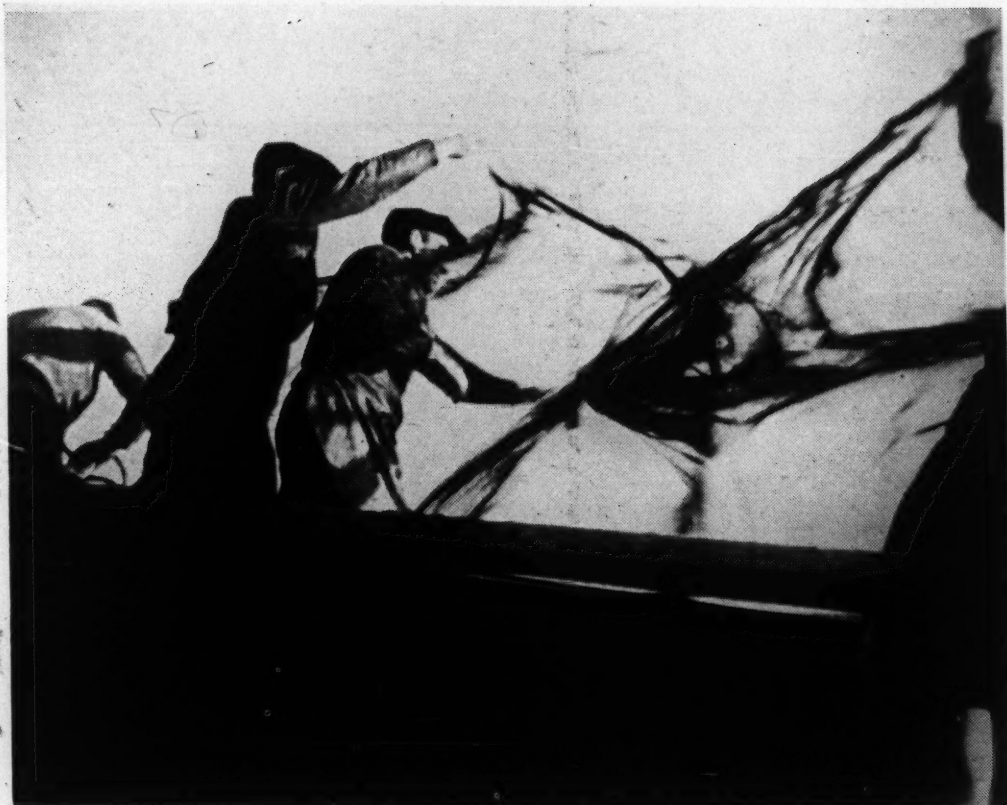
Filimonoff, the hero of the film, arriving in Charkow (Ukraine) sees the new buildings. *The Stump of an Empire.*



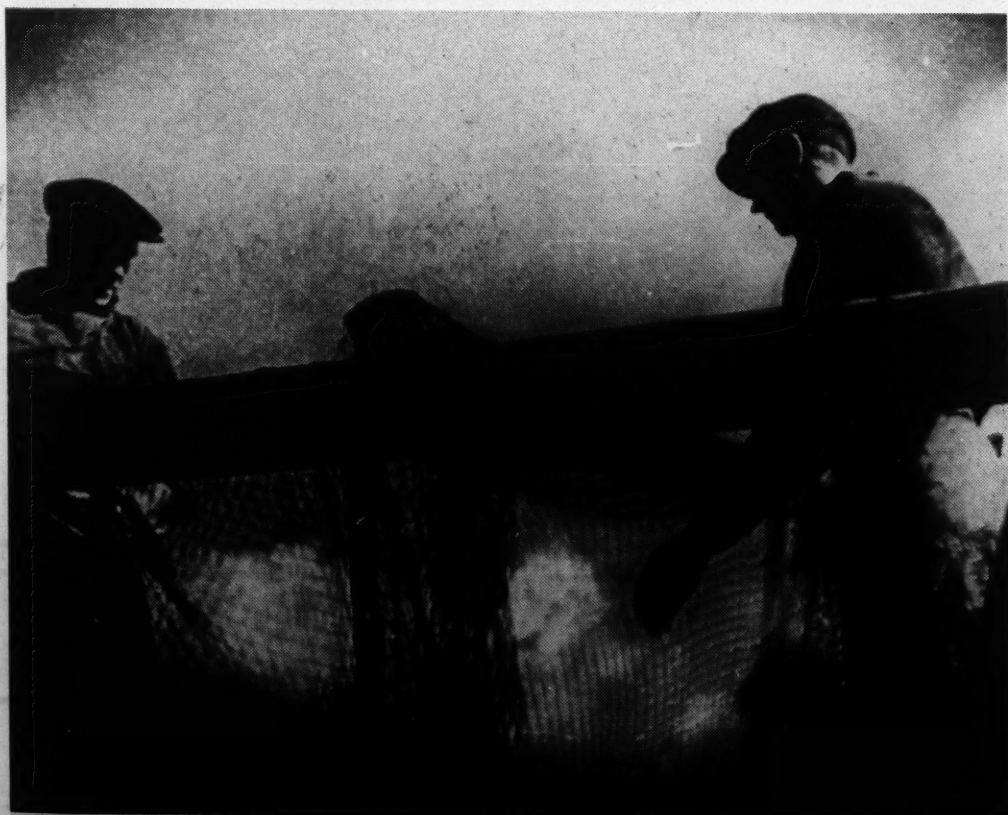
The Stump of an Empire. The factory dining room. The slogan says—"Against kitchen slavery—for the new life of woman."

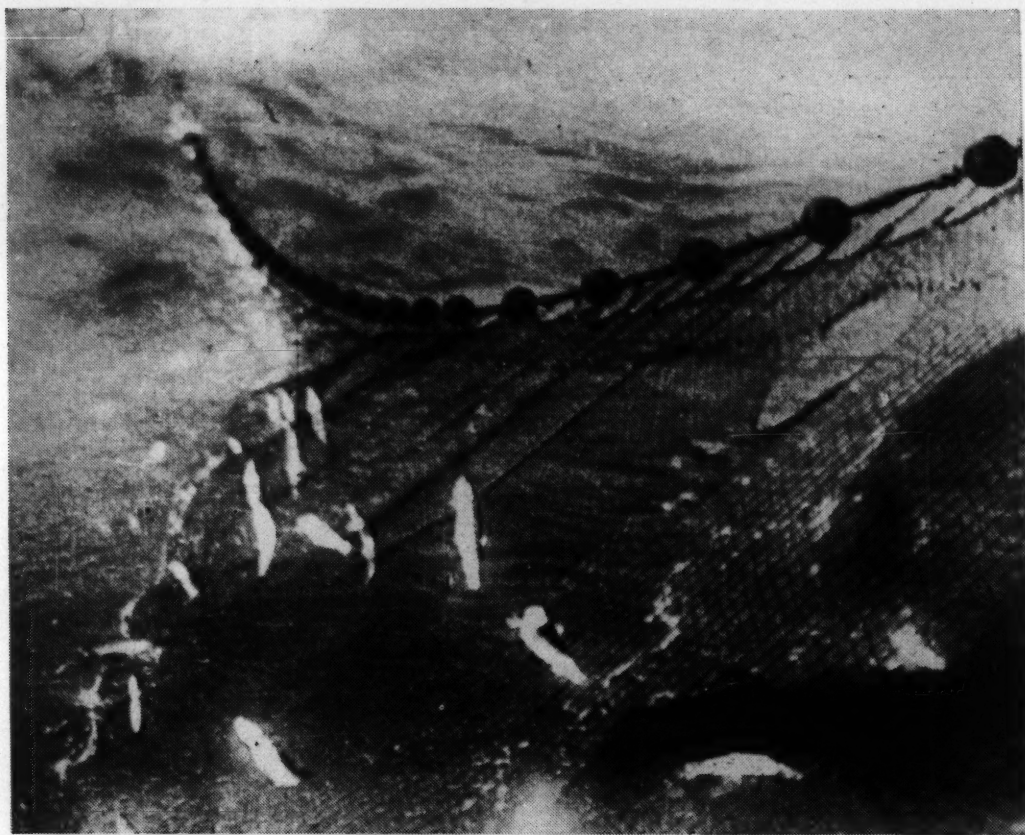


By Oswald Blakeston. Two designs in light.



From *Drifters*, a New Era film by John Grierson. See *Making a Film of the Actual*, by John Grierson in this issue.





A New Era film by John Grierson. *Drifters*. A saga of the herring fishers.



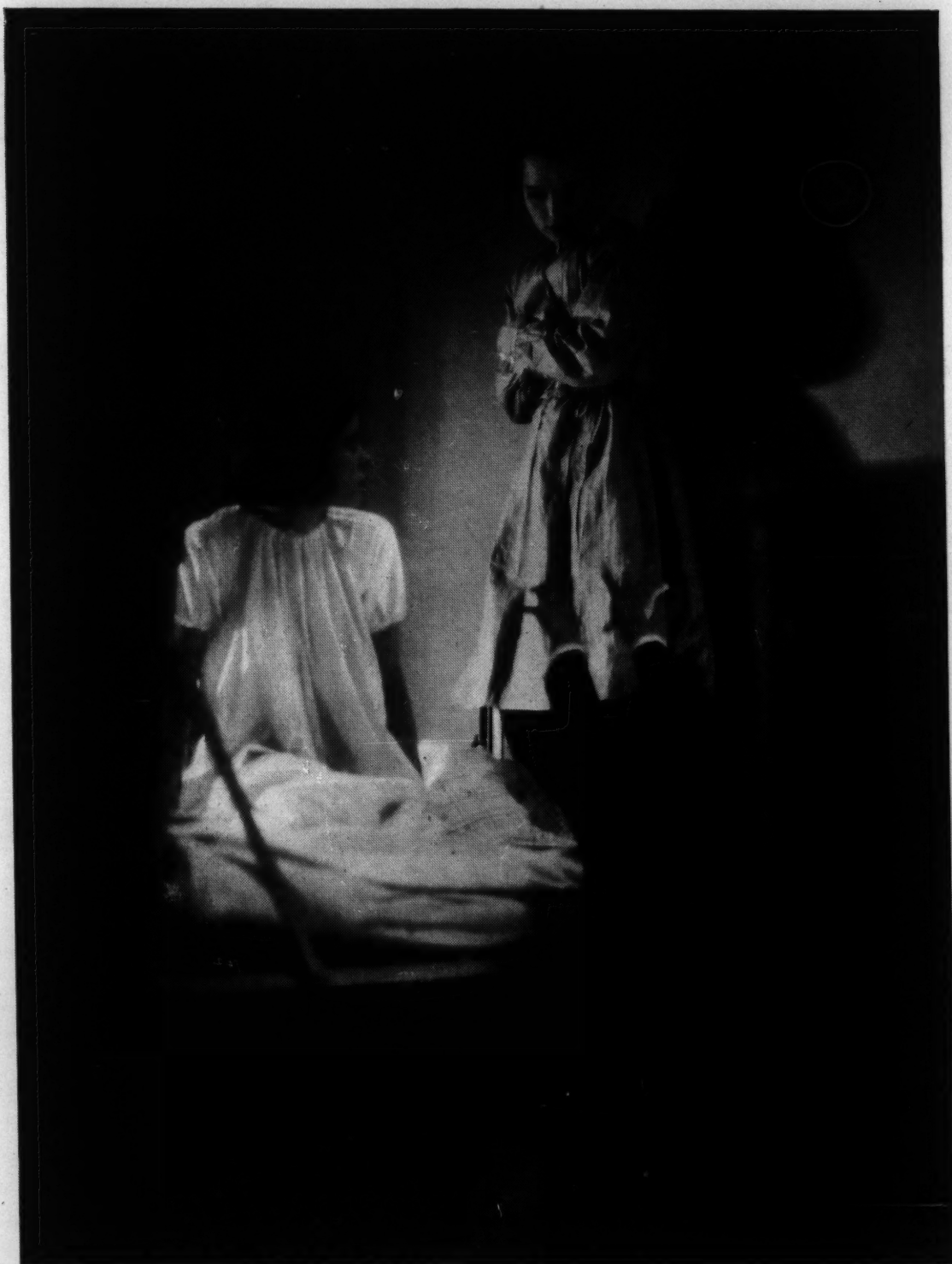
Louise Brooks and Edith Meinhard in *The Diary of a Lost Woman*, a new film by G. W. Pabst, from the novel by Margarete Bohme. Cameraman: Sepp Allgeier. Sets by Erno Metzner-Emil Hasler.



Louise Brooks in the Reformatory and Andrews Engemann as the Governor. *The Diary of a Lost Woman.*



Valeska Gert, as the Governor's wife is mobbed by the girls in the Reformatory. *The Diary of a Lost Woman.*



The beginning of the dormitory fight in *The Diary of a Lost Woman*, a new film by G. W. Pabst. Edith Brooks as Thymian and Edith Meinhard as Erika.

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composite motion pattern of great beauty formed by a superimposed ("condensed") mirror image of the overhead sheaf of lines.

Now, what or where am I approaching? With two dimensions of rapid forward motion presented to me, relativity steps in. I must re-orient myself mentally. I fail to feel either of the motions. Something earthbound in me is responsible. Much of the perspective effect has vanished, for "parallel" sheaves of lines perspectively viewed, cross where they should converge only. There is no depth . . . no space to rush forward into!

Before I was in motion (mentally) so now I feel a queer sensation of mental "inertia", for I must come to rest.

Something similar is quite a common experience: a long railway journey . . . a brief pause in a station . . . another train draws in on the next line . . . stops . . . then the strange thing happens. Yes! . . . we are off at last . . . see! we are passing the carriage windows of the other train. In a moment the mental impression of motion is shattered . . . the *other* train has drawn out, and beyond is the station kiosk! We are *not* moving, and have *not* moved. The ensuing momentary impression is one of "pulling up quickly" . . . inertia . . . which may actually throw one forward gently.

Exactly this I felt.

Surely I have arrived? Before I was in motion. Now I have stopped . . . felt the inertia on ceasing to "move". Yes, I have arrived in this land of beautiful machines in movement; watch them march, polished and sleek, balanced and balancing.

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Here is the strange optical illusion of the revolving perforated drum. Crudely, an optical illusion . . . significantly, a clever psychological "displacement" . . . a purely mental distortion . . . for the perforations have become the *things* at which I look. Speed increases. The spots dance.

The have materialised. The rest of the drum has gone! Again relativity.

And so my responses are played upon, always through visual impressionism. How heavy that bucket seems, drawn up by the steel rope slowly . . . lowered faster . . . drawn again slowly. And how satisfying when it is going down . . . how tiring its upward movement. I would have been psychically tensioned to tiredness if it had not finished on the down stroke. A study in gravitational force.

Then consider the nasty toothed creeper with its slow sickening motion yet beautiful lozenge pattern . . . the hideous machine which claws with 'hands of Orlac' into an empty bowl as though for ever seeking something fleshy to murder. Now clutching upwards, now down . . . practising!

The crane-grab which grabs and swings and is balanced by its own image, is still a crane grabbing and swinging in that other dimension where all white is *black*, and black is *white*. Deslaw has shown us the exquisite beauty of negative images in motion. There was profound innermost meaning in those brief negative shots which defies exact analysis in this dimension of black on white paper. Something terrifically fundamental, as though animate bas-relief had been turned into intaglio from whence it was moulded.

Rhythmic noise has a sequence to itself. The mechanical

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forge : the shaping of bars of metal the manifest content . . . noise the latent content. And how successfully was latent content " condensed " (to use the new Freudian terminology) by the visual mechanism of the " mix " into succeeding shots of cams and tappets higher up on the machine? The noise-rhythm was ever present in that sequence.

I am in doubt as to whether this noise-rhythm constitutes real " counterpoint ".

Very well, here surely should be sound? But I say not. Why demand a *real* sound counterpart any more than a real wetness counterpart to a rain-storm scene?

The last thing was, quite fittingly, the exhaust of gases from a tube . . . still pulsing rhythmically . . . the breathing of the machines as they march. Suggestively, the tube was away from the face.

* * *

In this film the camera revealed itself through the medium of its limitations. Certain motions were not of suitable rhythm for cinema. In one shot a flying weight governor stood still because its rhythm was a simple multiple of sixteen per second. This was observable partially in other shots also.

* * *

Are we then to conclude that Deslaw has addressed us primarily on a sort of " mind-dynamics " . . . presenting a series of impressions of mind-motion, inertia, balance, relativity, and what not, far more vital and understandable (to most) than the incomprehensibilities of the practical mathematician? I think so.

What a field there is opened for more work of this kind!

L. SAALSCHUTZ.

SUPERPRODUCER

Of course, we are all familiar with Mr. Silverspan's likeness which is reproduced from time to time in that most "exclusive" of fashionable periodicals, *Smart People*, where in common with Jimmy Petrikin, Irving Booth, and that sensation of our advance guard literature, Nana Noos, the superproducer finds a place of honor in the magazine's "Hall of Fame" as "the man who has made more dollars out of the movie-game and has given more pictures with *sophistication, punch, and real art* to the world than anyone we know." That aquiline nose and those sharp eyes, "denoting", we are informed by a gentleman of the Press, "shrewdness and genius in business affairs", "that heavy chin", to quote the same authority, "characteristic of born leaders of men" are revealed unmistakably even on the printed page.

And although in these scanty lines we may but trace, as it were, the footprints of the great man on the sands of time, leaving the weightier business of fathoming the profundities of his life history to the mighty pen of Billy Doran, the former butter and egg ad. man, (that Boswell, we may add in parenthesis, born again and born greater), nevertheless, movie-fans who know a "hero" when they see him will, it is certain, discover for themselves some moral, some lesson, something, even in the casual crumbs of wisdom fallen from the table of the great.

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It is but a sign of Billy Doran's ripened powers as biographer that in his masterly life of Silverspan which took the country by storm, *The Yacht that Nickels Built*, he follows to the limit Schiller's dictum that art consists also in knowing what to omit. To speak of the superproducer's inauspicious beginnings at the bottom as a "pants maker", to reveal the fact that while in his cups the gentleman is not what you might term "safe for democracy", laying upon occasion, as a matter of fact, a heavy hand on his own better half, (a moral trait which the forgiving Press now describes as the delightful eccentricity of a *mondain*) is not at all Billy's method who uses artistic restraint, discretion, and a refinement of taste not discoverable in writers of meaner powers. The future historian examining the records of the dark ages, so to say, of Silverspan's sartorial existence will be in a position to speak more freely than any contemporaries who often write of the movies with a view to a little contract or so.

The eager world always clamouring for news of its truly great men, must be content to know Silverspan only in moments when he shares with the public the burden of his thoughts. Climbers to the top sometimes take the bottom with them. However, in the case of our "hero", time and intercourse with professionals have bestowed among other virtues that sometimes go with money making that "aplomb and *savoir faire*", to borrow another gem from Billy Doran, which give weight to every utterance of his. It is at a momentous period in the history of the drama that we discover him on board of a transatlantic liner besieged by members of the Press always willing to gather the manna from Silverspan's lips unburdening himself on a topic of

universal interest. "Well, boys," he addressed on that famous occasion the assembled reporters, eagerly pencilling down each precious syllable of the famous man's utterance, "I suppose ye're waiting for me to tell you something about the 'talkies.' You can tell the world for me we've got the goods. It's great, great business, great dramatic stuff, great money-maker. Mark my word, the 'talkies' will sweep the four corners of the earth. Everywhere there's a colossal demand for them. Yes," and here the great man paused to flick off the ashes of his aromatic Havana, "and don't you forget for a moment, I'm going to stress this point for the benefit of some cranks, there's plenty of *art* in the 'talkies' for everybody's taste. Let me give you a single example. You fellows write, so you will get right away what I mean. Here, at the opening of a scene are several people playing cards in a hotel-room, a private house, or wherever it may be. Well, all of a sudden, mind you, while everything is nice and quiet, out comes a yell out of nowhere 'MURDER' . . . Imagine the effect on the audience. That's what I mean, boys, that's what I mean . . ." he dismissed the over-awed gentlemen of the Press with a triumphant smile and a wave of his cigar-stub.

Again the deft hand of the master-biographer "seizes" his subject at a moment of addressing a large assembly of ambitious college students listening to the successful be-diamonded person, not without the secret hope of emulating his great career. "Now, boys," Silverspan began his famous speech (partly republished here), "if I'm going to bother giving you a few valuable hints on this little Drama

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business of ours, it's because I've been aching for a long, long time to give a piece of my mind to some of you educated fellows, writers and others. Oh, yes, yes, you've got the knowledge, college degrees, Latin, and all that, but you have not got all the brains in the world, as may be some of you "intellectual" folks will realize some day. Go into my offices sometimes and see for yourself: they're full of college graduates working for a man who's never seen the inside of an institution. Let me tell you the meaning of all this: 'Where a man's purse is, there his heart is'. No matter what your business is, watch out where the dough comes in from. What's a man making shoes for? What's a prize-fighter getting his inside all busted up for? What's all the boys and girls trying to get a job in the movies for? For CASH is the answer. Say," and here Silverspan warmed up to his breathless audience, "look at all these highbrow English, Scotch, and other foreign writers whose books we've made into movies, the Kiplings, Barries, and the rest of them. Why, we trim their work to suit ourselves, and they dance to our tune, because money talks, always has and always will be. (Applause). Now I never read any books; I have more important things to do. But I know that Shakespeare and those other old boys are full of hokum that any writer working in my plant can do as well and better. Proof? Look at the cash receipts. Perhaps you see now that I do know something about my Drama business. Well, one of these days maybe, when I can take some time off for myself, I'll put it all between covers for you young folks to read. Remember, my first principle of the Drama is: 'Give the public what it wants'. And always remember too that

in our business we make MEN as well as good shows." Silverspan ended on a high moral note.

As has been intimated, the biographer is not at all backward in painting the picture of his "hero's" virtues. "Personality", "sophistication", "executive ability", "stick-to-itiveness", are with him the four cardinal virtues, and "personality" is, of course, the greatest of these. Nevertheless, whether out of modesty or superabundance of material, the writer omits to mention that in the intimacy of his office-room, especially, after a drink or so, Silverspan was wont to unburden himself of his weightier thoughts from which posterity, if it cares to, may learn a great deal. It is thus from as yet unpublished records that we are permitted to acquaint the world with Silverspan's theory of the Drama when he unlocked the mysteries of his soul to Jimmy Perkins, the winner of the National Scenario Contest, the author of *The Canadian Patrol*, newly enrolled among the elite of Silverspan's scenario writing intelligentsia. Jimmy Perkins requires a chapter all to himself. Suffice it to say now that never has any man had a more attentive or more worshipful audience than Silverspan had in Jimmy Perkins.

"Do you know," the grand old man of the movies groaned thru clouds of smoke, "what's put the business on its feet? Well, sir, I'll bet you a nickel you'll never guess. Give you three guesses. D'ye give up?—Pie is the word. The great old, American institution, the apple pie, the custard pie, the cream whipped pie that every comedian in the country threw around for years till he was blue in the face. The dear public was cool, shy of the business, until some clever boy, I think they ought to put up a monument

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to him, saw the light and gave them PIE. And how the people did flock to the shows, you know all about it. We've all bought ourselves yachts and limousines out of that first pie-money. Well, of course, pie is not *à la mode* any more, you might say, need a different class of show nowadays. But there's one staple article that the movies will always use, and never mind who says 'no'. 'Legs, legs, and some more legs' is what I've been preaching to my directors and writers ever since I've been in the business. The men come for the legs, the women for the costumes and for the handsome fellows. That's that, and John Rollstone says it mighty well in that whale of an article he wrote once. (See *Close Up* for July '29). Give them an undress show, as the police lets you and watch the mob at the ticket office, reverends, censors, good people and all.

"Well, sir, you may not be too old to remember that after the pie and the falling downstairs business came the Vamp. And the vamp has come to stay, no matter what they say to the contrary. Our stars keep us well posted about their correspondence. You'd be surprised to hear that a great many women write to say that they wish they were in the vamp's place. It's the women who make up most of the vamp's fans, get that straight. A sex appeal picture will usually make more money than a 'crook' picture a 'mystery' picture, a Russian picture or a Jewish comedy. Occasionally, when we have a colossal genius like that German actor we can put over something big without sex appeal. But the general run of picture always leans towards 'sexy' stuff. Any girl who has 'it' is welcome to my business, but they're not to be found on a vacant lot."

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"That's what I say," Perkins reports as having ventured to say.

"I'm telling you, Buddy," Silverspan continued, "I've got the whole Drama business classified, from A to Z. First in the lot come the 'sex' pictures, and that includes the sheik stuff, the gold diggers, the sophisticated society play, the Broadway picture, the 'Clown with the Broken Heart' movie, practically the cream of the industry. Next to this staple article is the 'mystery' or 'crook' picture, because the dear public likes almost as much a good crook picture with some shooting in it as they do a leg show.

"Of course, we've got a few side lines that are always big money producers. Kentucky troubles always go over big. South seas, Jewish comedies, Russian Aristocracy, all about those naughty counts and dukes who fall in love with our girls, Canadian Patrol, Chinatown stuff, and Parisian sin are all good market articles. And if a picture is a grand success, it don't hurt to repeat it under a different name. Let's say, if *Broadway Flappers* is a money maker, then we change the plot around a bit and call it *Broadway Jazz*, and there you have another knock-out. There you have the whole thing in a nutshell, you might say, the whole drama business that all these wiseacres write about without knowing the first principle. Short and sweet, take it or leave it.

"You may wonder, perhaps, why we took your *Canadian Patrol* picture in preference to a lot of other mighty good scenarios in the National Contest. What I want in my business is a lot of young fellows who are willing to learn, none of your highbrows that are eager to tell me what to do. Not that I can't appreciate originality like when you make

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the crook in your picture hide in a tree. I could see the point right away. We'll buy out any man's original ideas whether he calls himself Shakespeare, or Jimmy Perkins. Well, that's why you are here to-day under contract, my boy."

"Well, old top," he indicated the end of the audience by a shifting of the chair, "I'd better be moving, got a lot of hard work ahead of me yet. Pete Heineman, my director, Rosa del Oro, and myself are going for a yacht trip to frame a movie that's going to take the world by storm. Between me, and you, and the telephone pole, Rosa is a peach of a girl, some personality, she can soak her socks in my coffee any day."

And Jimmy Perkins went out into the air, the faint aroma of a Havana cigar lingering about him like the august memory of the Presence he had just quitted. And like the seers of old, foretasting future bliss, he saw himself in his mind's eye mounting rapidly that ladder of SUCCESS which leads from the bottom of twenty-a-week pay envelopes, dirty press rooms, sneers of "superiors" to that desirable heaven where Publicity Agents attend with baited breath the steps of Majesty, where left-handed affairs with "girlies" are considered by broad-minded, truly Christian Gentlemen of the Press but as pardonable extravagances of supersophisticated geniuses, and the society of princes, counts, millionaires, "beauties", politicians, bootleggers, short story world champions, and adoration, and adulation, and "parties", bank accounts, and more bank accounts are but in the daily round of life . . .

And he saw all this and it was good. MICHAEL STUART.

THE STUMP OF AN EMPIRE

(Production of the Leningrad Sovkino Studio, 1929).

Director—F. ERMLER.

Scenario—CATHERINE VINOGRADSKAYA.

Operator—E. SCHNEIDER.

Why *The Stump of an Empire*, and what does the film tell? What are the questions it raises, and what the replies it suggests?

The Stump of an Empire tries, most acutely and earnestly, to total the tremendous constructive work accomplished in the USSR after the October Revolution. And, first of all, it speaks of the achievements attained by the workers.

In the turmoil of our every-day work, whirled away by the powerful tempo of the day, we have lost perspective on actuality. We must fall back for a spell that we may perceive how much of the new and unusual there is hidden for the brain, the ear and the eye of an outsider (a kind of "Stump of an Empire") in terms by now, conventional for us, like—Factory Committee, Labour Protection Committee, etc.

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You will find in this film numerous episodes and numerous slogans which are of the greatest importance and are exactly a reflection of the modern Soviet ideals.

The Stump of an Empire is permeated by the most acute political problems of the moment. These include questions of Socialist construction, of culture, of production relationships, of labour discipline, Socialist competition and, finally, the "General Human" problem of love and marriage. All these tasks, these problems, are linked up, moulded together within the main theme of the film.

The subject of *The Stump of an Empire* is quite simple . . . At a certain railway station, so far away that it is lost in the endless steppes, toils a former soldier, who, as a result of a contusion received during the 1914-18 war had lost his memory. He is Filimonoff, an ex-N.C.O. (Trains hurl by. Before his sleeping memory life is passing, rushing with all speed). And suddenly, through the window of a train he sees a face. A face which is familiar, which has been near and dear to him. In vain he tries to recall the face, but his memory slumbers on. Only a miserable debris of it can he catch, and this too is easily distracted, even by a cigarette box.

The train has left. Nothing has happened.

Filimonoff had been a hosier by profession. The tap-tapping of a sewing machine aids him to reconstruct, mentally, his past life. The tap-tapping of the machine—as the cracking of the machine-gun. The machine-gun, the front . . . In the depths of his slumbering memory flash, suddenly, tiny sparks, tatters of recollection . . . The battle

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front, blazing streaks of swiftly moving searchlights, crucifixions on the fields of Galicia and that calm Cyclops—the Tank—crushing fallen bodies with cold relentlessness . . .

Filimonoff has remembered . . . He jumps into a cattle-car bound for Leningrad (which still is “St. Petersburg” for him) to seek his wife.

Here begins a story picturing the re-birth of a man who has returned from a dark, a blind existence as Non-commissioned Officer Filimonoff, to a consciousness of his power and the all-powerful triumph of his victorious class.

The main perception of this man lies in his feeling of class interest concerning all that goes on about him. The makers of the film do not lead Filimonoff to stop in ecstasy before the pathetics of our day, but thrust him boldly into the clash of social conflicts where he finds his full recognition of social consciousness. It is characteristic that his first conscious idea—reminiscence of the war—brings home sharply his class relation to war. The film is, in this respect, the first and most powerful production of the working class with an international point of view. It's our own Soviet Remarque and our point of view of the war.

A new relationship to labour brings about and dictates new social forms of relations between chiefs and subordinates, between men and women, between Red Commander and private. A series of shocks brings the hero to the problem which must have appeared fundamental to his still immature labour psychology.

“Who is the boss?”

And the film replies:

“The working collective is the boss”.

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Only when the man has mastered this problem does his psychology begin to grasp and unravel other problems.

Seeing his neighbour working on the next bench drinking Vodka, he cries: "And you are boss? You're a rogue!"

The Stump of an Empire ends with the following sub-title: "We have still much work to do, comrades". This ending is particularly significant as the Film is deeply rooted in the social and political life of the Soviet country. It calls, not to sentimental self-worship, but to indefatigable, tireless work and frank admittance of errors and difficulties.

The Film was produced and mounted in 14 months. The location scenes were shot in Odessa, Leningrad and Kharkov, but all scenes taken in these cities have been mounted as though belonging to one city; by this it is desired to point out that it was the aim of director F. Ermler to give the general aspect of this newly constructed country, a synthetic portrait of socialist construction.

The Stump of an Empire is only the fifth production of Ermler and his group. A film made by him is known in Europe: *Katka—the Paper Ranet (They who Live by the Street—*in German: *Die Von der Strasse Leben*).

P. ATTASHEVA.

Moscow, October, 1929.

OVER THE MOON

It was the cow that did it first, and Fritz Lang followed. Forgive me, please. What an extraordinary world it was. Why did the cow jump over the moon? Did she feel drawn to it by dairy-associations with cheese, and did she with one fell hoof kick the (milk) bucket and jump to a dimension where the only cheese was dead, and inorganic moon? Then again, why is the cat always credited with interest in the fiddle, and not the dog? The dog, you will remember, only barked—to see such fun. But the cat went with the fiddle, perhaps in an effort to improve its voice, foreseeing the days of a synchronised Felix, but in any case, who knows? The fun the dog liked was nothing he saw in the cinema, in those days, and if we wished to have this absurd series of events pan-chronised, what kind of a kingdom would it be? The movies leave it alone. "The screen is the window of fantasy", but this special fantasy and all it means, if anything, and what it did to us, a lot, has the blind pulled over it. We say, a man of imagination should do this for us. A man of imagination should bring wit and amusement to the screen, and we get Lotte Reiniger, which isn't quite the same. And Robert Florey isn't really "witty". And then again, we don't want wit that is the intellectual substitute

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for humour, we want wit that isn't a substitute for anything, but a dash in the way of serving, a smile in the way of looking, a satire and sympathy, and we can go on talking like this, and projecting our own selves over a metaphysical moon, until we fail to notice what is happening at our feet. And I am very fond of what my feet are in touch with.

I meant to write flatly on sound imagery, and I have begun saying hey-diddle-diddle, and got struck, thinking how often critics present the spectacle of moon-jumping cows. For the moon is a good way out of it when you are confronted with something new on earth, taking the moon as exotic symbol. Confronted with some new growth, which needs trouble and inward-delving to understand, and, perhaps of more immediate importance to you, fresh vocabulary to write with confronted with a forest of unblazed talkie-trees, it is easy to fly to the moon and dig up a bit of old cheese (historical value), growing, alive—O, yes, but the wrong way round. Jump over the moon and return with some Griffith gorgonzola or a piece of Camembert Chaplin. Everyone will believe you if you write about the revolutions Chaplin wrought, even if they think his films the worst argument you could possibly adduce, even if *The Circus* seems to them a danse macabre of daguerreotypes. Again, you can gnaw bits off the moon when there is nothing else, you imply, worth your attention. Write about an exotic actor, detect (laudibly, but a trifle lavenderishly) hints of Russian, O, damn that word, cutting in an old Essanay, and miss, just because they are ordinary, the exciting things that are happening on nice-smelling earth.

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It is well that people should keep alert their Diogenes lamp and light up the odd corners of the screen (though I always had an idea he brought a few cobwebs out of his tub); it is well to have everything dug up and recorded, Glozel as well as Luxor, but it is a pity to be so engrossed in moon-jumping that you miss the cat with its fiddle, three times daily, on earth. You are so likely to because this cat isn't photographed or silhouetted, is just a comic drawn cat. But it actually is comic, adjective from comedy, not from music-hall. Yes, don't miss the cartoon shorts because you only go in for the big picture. I have seen them lately at the Carlton, the Capitol, Mme. Tussaud's (let us now praise Mr. Ogilvie). When the film was bad, they saved my life; when the film was good, what an excellent cocktail they were!

I went in to see *Four Feathers*. Annoyed, angered, I-knew-it-ed. Good things, of course, good things, but some would have been excellent if they'd been let alone, not dolled up with a story and actors who, though among the pleasantest maybe in Hollywood, were here distasteful by their inappropriateness. But before, there had been a Micky Mouse Cartoon that I laughed at and liked. I don't remember laughing so much or being let down so little after one funny bit, since talkies were in. I have always liked the cartoon films, despite the name. The French, in this, manage this better; they call them "dessins animés", and the Tribune Libre once had a seance consecrated to them. Felix and Krazy Kat, even Inkwell Imp are my friends, and here and now I would like to stake a protest against using Felix to typify popular entertainment with a sneer. He is

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one of the most intelligent ideas on the screen, as I shall suggest why.

I make a point of seeing these curious black drawings in their transit across the screen, but this one at the Carlton happened to be the first one synchronised that I really registered. I saw a Krazy Kat in Paris, *Beaches and Scream*; it was a very good one. I had seen it silent, and its mechanical music made it no better. Then some British dog was shown at the Tivoli with barks and noises which were quite literal and wrong for a flat drawn dog. Sound was here misused, and it was a very common little dog. It didn't even raise the problem, why was it no better. It was a British film, and bad British films just make one shudder and withdraw, close-in in self-defence against so much muddled violation of truth and technique and taste. One never succeeds, though one has enough practice, in extracting any problems from a bad British film, whereas a bad American one bristles with points. The British pup meant nothing, and I let it go, without being stirred to think of sound in the future applied to animated drawings. There was so much else to consider about sound, the synchronised cartoon as a problem only cropped up among the *Four Feathers*, cropped up, I suppose, because I was ready to consider them.

The Carlton had *When the Cat's Away*. One saw the cat go away. Not very imaginative so far. But already funny; one heard the tunes, and the tune had the same burlesque emphasis of the essentials as the flat broad jumps of the cat. It locked its door, clatter-ping-click. Took out a bottle and drank, gurgle-splash and "Little Brown Jug". All serious, as regards the technical synchronising. That is part of the

joke, that the score is really not so crude as whatever it was they dished up for *The Godless Girl*. The cat then hopped over the hills, to the obvious tune; the absurdity of drawn cat going so solemnly away underlined by the music being what a score-scratcher would naturally think suitable; "far away" indicated on the film, therefore that tune in the script, no matter what may be the circumstances or status of the person going far away. The mouse now appears and now we have fun in the cinema. Another one pops up, and is made into a key with which to unlock the door. Body elongates, and tail is twisted into a handle. Mice multiply as if by magic, and indeed it is by magic; there were two standing there, and they go in, and yet the same two, or as like as makes no difference, hop up again, and another same two and another. Two of whom leap at the piano when they enter the cat's house. They hop on the keys, and we hear what they do. There is a piece of music on the piano, and they play it by hopping out the chords; other mice rush up and down the stops of the saxophone. It is funny to think of mice playing pianos this way. We think how funny it would be if they did. I knew a rat that used to come out and perch on my editor's table, sitting on the blotter to nibble his notepaper, after we had left. It would have been a pretty picture. I never saw it, but I knew the rat. I know these mice, and I see them doing things like that rat did. I see, whereas with the rat I had to imagine. I see mice doing what I had to imagine. I also hear them doing what I imagine, and that is not so easily brought about usually. You can always draw or write what you see in your mind's eye, but it is not so easy to impart to people in sound the

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noises you hear in your mind's ear, with your ear's mind. To see mice playing a piano by dancing on it we have been used to; we would have liked to have heard them too, but we have not been able to, so we have suppressed it, and half the laughter that greets these sound cartoons is due to release. That is what leader-writers call "responding to a novelty".

At the end of the piece, they bow, and turn over another one. "Lieber Augustin" followed by "Listen to the Gentle Mocking Bird". One of the mice does a barlet to it, and being rather vain and getting out of time through indulging in solo turns and balancings, is frowned at by the other mouse, who stops this particular turn when the piece is over. He sees that the piano is a pianola. There ought to be some rolls. It is the privilege of these films that they decided early that whatever ought to be, should be, being in this way at once pre, or post, and super-Eden. There are no rolls, but there is a nice piece of Gruyere cheese. The audience no sooner sees the cheese than it recognises the studded holes and associates them with the perforations of the pianola rolls. You couldn't get this immediate response any other way. When you think what has been done in this small piece of association, you will admit it is remarkable. The cheese is placed in the pianola, and plays gaily along. Where there is a string of holes close together, we hear a delicious trill (which startles the mice). The effect on the mind of a piece of cheese in a drawn pianola producing real, heard notes, is complex. The cheese comes unfixed, and flops down, boom, boom, boom, boom, on the keys, until the resourceful mouse pins it down, and

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we proceed to watch the others, but first consider to ourselves what we have really watched. Some records are found.

It would dismay most people to find first a pianola with no rolls and then some records about, with no machine. They would "talk nasty" about fate. But these creatures are their own fate, and the most fated of them squats down, is twisted round and round by the tail until he may be considered wound up, and in the process has his neck made nicely spiral. The record is then put on his upheld nose, and as he spins round, another mouse plays it with his tail. All of this is made possible, made into a coherent world because the artist back of it is noticing. He notices what things are like, and when he has half an actual thing, he supplements it with something *like* it, and so by degrees and without knowing it, invents a world of metaphysical mice, using associational symbols. The record cracks, the mouse winds down, and peculiar noises ensue. The sound is as funny and un-actual as the event, and for once in a film is as funny as the picture.

There is a mouse jazz-band, and mice dancing. A marvellous burlesque of screen tango, and wholly amazing close-ups of the jazz-band which, for sheer getting there, are so much more unkind than the actual close-ups of semi-erotic inanity brayed out by half-cast ill-breds in over-done misfits. If it is absurd for mice to stamp and sway as if they were mad, how much madder, we suddenly think, must these aforementioned gentlemen be. Mouse-head hey-heying is the last comment on Vitaphone shorts and Broadway attitude, and big business in its O how off-moments.

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At the Capitol, a cat got its tail caught in a mouse-trap. Whereupon its intended victim leapt aboard, careering round as a surf-rider. At Tussaud's, before *The Glad Rag Doll*, which there is no reason to stay away from, I saw *The Opry House*. This is the animals' vaudeville show. To appreciate it, you must have the mouse angle on life in your mind. Realise that the cat is always what one is up against, the mouse's race-problem, as it were. Moreover, these films are the mouse's relief from life, rodent relaxation. If mice had the motion-picture habit, they would enjoy these films. And since it is you who are seeing them, you must approach as nearly as you can to the correct mouse outlook. Then you will understand why it is natural to have, instead of a row of bells, a set of cats sitting on a shelf. When the band wants a chime of bells, a mouse just pulls all their tails quickly. One after another, kitten, small cat, cat, big cat, mother, father, patriarch. Yi, yu, yow, YOW. Cat-calls are the sweetest music to a mouse's ear.

The show begins and one plays the piano. When two of the notes will not do what he wants, he punishes them. He ties them together in a knot. The piano resents him, and turning its front legs into paws, it sends him flying. Then it curves its new-found hands up from underneath and plays itself itself. You see the chain; legs, paws, hands. This is most natural. A piano has legs, so it is given leg-properties. These are its front legs, so they are given front leg properties, and front legs being equivalent to hands, it plays the notes. Later, thinking that its keyboard is really rather like a set of teeth, the artist gives it a mouth, and lets it take its curtain smiling and bowing. This freedom of

imagery has always been one of the delights of the cartoon film. There was Felix's tail, which could become anything from a state of mind to an implement, hook, rope, or wheel. I always wanted Mr. Ogilvie to revive some of the Felix films; I hope the new series will be as good.

In *Beaches and Scream* there was one sequence which was so rare, that I will describe it although I have already written of it before. Krazy Kat bathes. The sea is cold. He jumps out, encased in a block of ice. The sea is therefore cold. You have been told it quite simply, but with very little connection. He jumps into water, and jumps out in a block of ice. There is no simile or slow approach. It is quick, as if you were to say he turned on the tap and drove icicles into his face. People would at once say that if the tap was running, there could be no icicles. So you are stopped a lot of fun, and cannot say this sort of thing as quickly as you think it, which always seems to me a pity, and why do we write, I should like to know, and when we can't do that sort of thing, WHY do we write?

The next thing is that the sea should be warm. So The Kat lights a fire under it. The sea is foamy at the edge, like a fringe. But we have no need to insert that word. The sea simply has a fringe, and therefore is a carpet, and can be lifted up. But still being sea, it is displeased and fringes being fingers, it is a hand that leans out to smack the cat.

The simple high spirits take you up with them so much that you don't notice the significance of what is being done, the extremely abstract quality of the film, the complete reliance on imagery. You don't see, unless you have learnt

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to, that you are watching, in this cat cartoon, a complicated succession of thoughts, feelings, reactions in a wild but controlled rush of imagery. You don't get that you are seeing something expressed for once exactly as your mind works. It isn't made simpler, or linked up more, or less quick in its transitions. Half of this is due to the fact that it is drawn cat and a drawn mouse. They never existed, save in the author's mind, and so they are untrammelled and unrepresentational. The screen here really is the plate of the author's mind. We are watching what has never happened anywhere else. Watching it absolutely clear, as he drew it. Not people who did not exist acted by people who exist differently, but mouse that never was expressing mouse that never was. Essence of mouse, free to move as swiftly and peculiarly as the mind. And all the time to be quite clear to everyone as to what they mean, which is so remarkable. Of course, if you told people what they were going through when they saw Micky Mouse, they would be confused and no longer able to enjoy him. As it is, they accept him quite readily and naturally, mind in the fauteuil responds to mind back of the screen.

Where else, in what other way, could you make your tail not only a bottle when you are thirsty, but a corkscrew as well? And then, when you begin to "see things", convert it into a telescope to see them with, and, finally, still have it ready as an exclamation mark to express your surprise, which is so like a comet that you at once ride off on it, to be seen again, as the iris closes, next week, tea and chocolates in the interval?

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This imagery is as real as that which talks of the "sea-horses" or, up in the Arctic, calls some goddess of rough weather, "Bloody Haired". And here strangely, sound is perfectly in key with this kind of imagery. Sometimes it is literal, working across the idea of the picture, and that is funny; sometimes it is literal when the picture is literal, when a tub is a tub, and when the tub has become a gasometer, it is still tub-music, which is adding to our state of mind, giving it layer. Sometimes the sound is imagery when the picture is not, and sometimes it is plainly comic, as when a goat plays his beard when his violin breaks. You can never tell how the dog will break or what sound the cat will make with the fiddle, but the film itself knows. Mouse-dance to straight human music is funny when that mouse-dance is also burlesque of human dance. And it is funny, and releasing too, to hear weird new noises, the sound of a mouse at play or the triumph of a mouse-group, yowls and honks and new distortions. These films are the first to be generally made and shown as a matter of course in which sound is used as it should be, and the result is not just a film with funny music attached, but all the powers of association heightened by the combining of picture and sound; together they make something neither could have made alone, a more potent inroad into our consciousness.

Being drawings, everything happens under our eyes; piano legs turn to Paderewski hands, sea to carpet, crowded train to sardine tins, all conceived in movement. It is not only that they are full of action, but that everything that goes on in the minds of the animals is seen as it goes on, in moving imagery. And being drawings, what the mouse

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imagines is seen in the same dimension, of the same world as the mouse itself. Drawn, and so equally real. Sea turning to dragon does not turn to a plaster or even a Hollywood tame one, but to a real drawn dragon, as real as the sea which is drawn.

The creator of the Micky Mouse sound films is Walt Disney, and he works for Paramount. For myself, whenever I find these on, I find ten minutes of real cinema, sound and silent but they are slight films, shorts, not to be elevated and cultivated. To be taken for what they are, with a certain amount of realising that they are more than you may think, and not to be missed because "I only go in for the big picture, I really couldn't sit through a whole dreadful programme."

ROBERT HERRING.

KINO AND LICHTSPIEL

There is a similarity between the German film and the French. It is the similarity of the studio and the atelier. But the similarity ceases very soon, for the French cinematist takes his atelier outdoors; the German cinematist puts his outdoors into the studio. The German film has never left the

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studio. That is one of the gravest limitations in the German kino. It thwarted a film like *Homecoming*, made the entire rendering of *Asphalt* false. Certainly the studio structure is essential to some films: it was the success of *The Last Laugh*. But if the Germans insist upon their studio filming, they must be willing to omit certain themes and contents from their consideration.

The problem, however, is larger than this. The German mind, as revealed in the film, is the mind for the principle. The Germans have given the cinema some of its major principles, but have seldom been the ones to realize these principles. To the world's cinema the German film has been most important. But to itself it has contributed only formulas in theme and construction. Therefore the German kino has really never developed. In brief, in Germany it is the artisan-mind that prevails, not the artist-mind. The principle-mind, not the creation-mind.

The principles the Germans have given to the cinema are:

- (1) The integration of light, decor, performer . . .
- (2) The thematic narrative . . .
- (3) The cinema pre-plan . . .
- (4) The effective submission of the actor . . .
- (5) The camera as a major instrument . . .
- (6) In sum, control and discipline . . .

As details or stresses of these principles one may include: the maturity of the actor, the constructed, in place of recorded-cinema, the film as uninterrupted visual imagery, and so forth. It is apparent that the German contribution is most tremendous. But how far have the Germans gone in the realization of these principles? Take certain

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examples : *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, *Torgus* or *The Coffin-Maker*, *The Last Laugh*, *The Last Fiacre of Berlin*, *The Wax-Figure Cabinet*, *The Street* . . . Take the work of Ernest Lubitsch, Paul Leni, Lupu Pick, Arthur Robison, Ludwig Berger, Fritz Lang, Georg Pabst . . . *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*.

It will seem sacrilegious on my part, to many enthusiasts, were I to say that this is not a great film. Indeed I shall say with Leon Moussinac that it is not a work of art, but a film date. You will find that the enthusiasts are usually painters or people who think and remember graphically, never cinegraphically. Gilbert Seldes, the American journalist, writing in the new volumes of *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, speaks of the film thus :

“ Without immediate effect on public or producers, this film is memorable because of its effects on the critics; it may be said that *Caligari* created motion-pictures criticism in England and America.¹ French critics hold it in low esteem because of its elaborate scenario; yet even they allow its chief virtues : that it worked chiefly through the camera (although the subtitles in the American presentation were lengthy and frequent) and broke entirely with realism on the screen . . . *Caligari* means that the motion picture must be created not photographed . . . ”

Mr. Seldes has said nothing in his commentary to indicate the merit of the film itself as realization. He has indicated the principle or principles which it exemplified. Nor is he

¹ This is not altogether true, and I shall have something to say of this in a later paper. What Mr. Seldes may mean is that it made movie criticism for Mr. Seldes.

correct in asserting that the objection of the French critics was to the elaborateness of the scenario. The objection of the *absolutists*—Leger for instance—was, at that time, to any scenario at all, any narrative scenario that is. *Caligari* was, if anything, naïvely simple in its content. Indeed, one of my objections is the general objection I have to the simplism of German fantasy, of which I shall speak later. But the major objection to *Caligari* was and still is that, while it intended integration of light, decor, performer and mood of narrative upon a defined sequence, its structure, its quasi cubist-expressionist structure, was that of the stage-illustration. That, in fact, with its infantile non-realism, was its appeal. Of *Torgus* I have spoken in an earlier article. *The Last Laugh*:

Seldes says of this film:

" Films without subtitles had appeared before; the distinction of this one was that everything the picture had to say, and it said some subtle things, was said by the means of the camera. What is more, the correlation of scenes was perfect, the separate sequences held together, and needed no connection or explanation." This is rather elementary discovery. The importance of *The Last Laugh* is multiple and more transcendent than Mr. Seldes indicates. It set down the first form of the cinema: the simple universal theme without complexity of narrative details. And it realized, as well as articulated in intention, the principle of constructed, unvacillating environment converging upon the character in relief. It is, to my mind, the only German film I have ever seen that, working upon an inclusive principle

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and a definite preconception, has realized *itself*. That is why F. W. Murnau remains for me the most effective of German directors, although for philosophic sincerity I look elsewhere: perhaps to Paul Czinner.

An exception. I think here of *Vanina*, made by von Gerlach, who died prematurely. I leave this film out of the consideration of German films. It is *the* film of films which indicated the path of *plastic fluidity* the cinema should have taken but never took. Its rhythmic structure is not German, nor has it been apprehended as a pivotal source by the land where it has been most appreciated, France. Perhaps there have been attempts to follow *Vanina*, but those films which may have been such ventures (as I detect the likely ones) seem to be following its faults rather than its rhythmic precept. Indeed most directors of Paul Wegener seem to remember *Vanina* for Paul Wegener rather than von Gerlach.

Karl Grune made *The Street*.¹ It too was admirable in its reduced statement of the pathetic adventure of the man. It too emphasized the organisation of the light in the mood. But it did not maintain its mood nor its temper of pathos. I think this is due to two traits exhibited by most German directors: the infidelity of their emotional concern, and their unawareness of the difference between the structure of melodrama and that of tragedy. I should go on to say that these two traits are the same and they are closely related to the artisan-outlook of the German director and his affection for the studio.

¹ The failure of both *Vanina* and *The Street* before the tribunal of American movie critics indicates the absence of any instinct for first laws in that high body.

I have never seen a German film that attained beyond tragi-pathos. What is a most frequent literary source for the German film? The writings of Sudermann. Certainly Sudermann was not a writer of the tragedy of man. He was a fabricator. He has the episodes of Lagerlof, of Hardy, of Ibsen, but not their cumulative exposal. Or similarly Frank Wedekind. He compiled social dramas. His works were fabrications too. Therefore Pabst's *Lulu* is a fabrication. The film, (I am speaking generally) like water, never rises above its source. That is a first law of art. The entire German cinema, with several notable exceptions, turns toward the fabricated. That is the artisan-mind, the studio-mind, the mind that delights in virtuositities, in camera sketchings, in fringe-filmings rather than penetrations. This mind is as apparent in Pabst as in Leni. This is the mind that is not concerned with the material at all, but only with the instruments. Pabst works over the surfaces of his films, along the edges. Never does he look *into* an object, as does a Jean Epstein.¹ It is significant that the word, *photogenic*, is French in origin and not German. When Jean Epstein sketches and moves up and down a line or an object, I recognise the intention as speculative, even though

¹ (Mr. Potamkin makes so definite a statement that we feel impelled to intrude on his space to point out that his "Never" is in relation to Mr. Potamkin's perception of Pabst; a point of view, in short, which differs fundamentally from our own—that of Pabst's major virtues, the gift of penetration and exploration is among the first to be apprehended. His intuitive and psychic awareness is self-evident and helped to expression by a technique whose fault would lie perhaps in super consciousness rather than in the irrelevance and non-assertiveness that are "the artisan's experiment". . . . This, too, remains a point of view. Ed.)



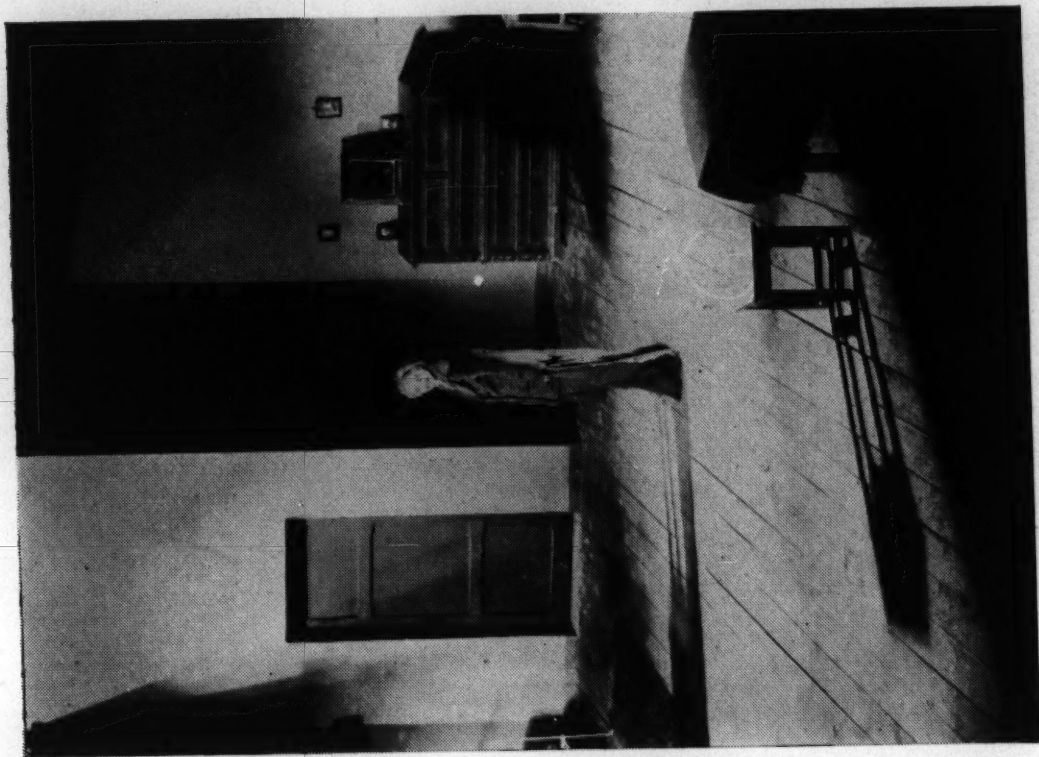
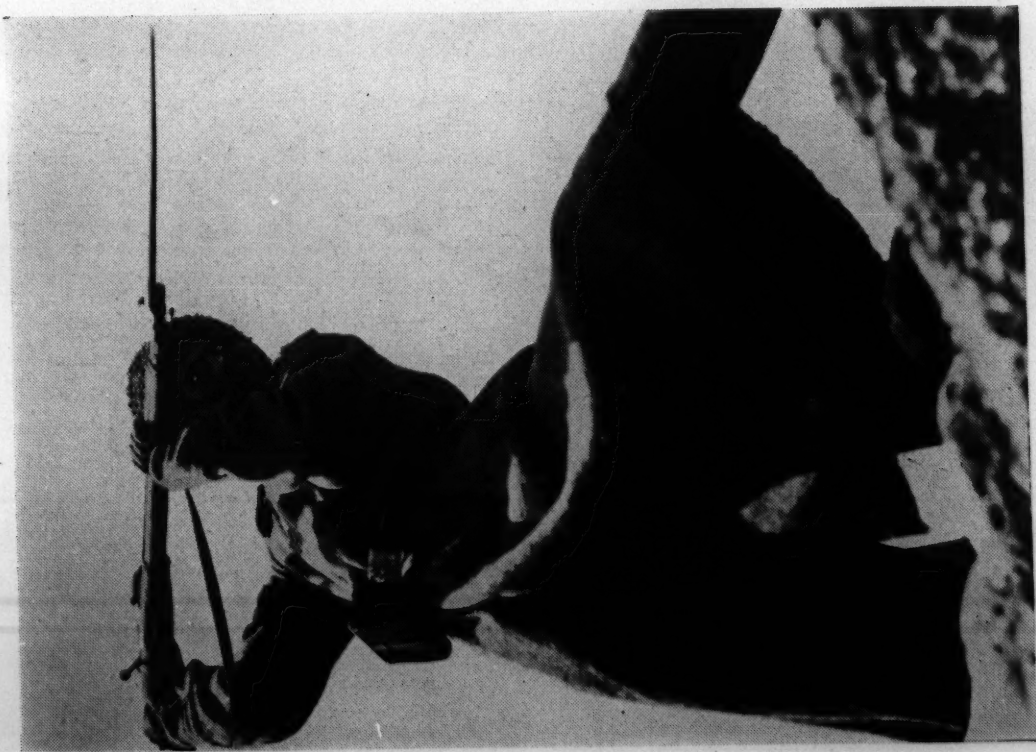
From *Arsenal*, Dovjenko's acclaimed masterpiece for Wufku.



From *The Sold Appetite*, a film by N. Ochlopkoff, based on Lafargue's novel.



God of The War. An anti-religious, anti-war film of the Georgian Kino, directed by Dsigan. Cameraman :
Taboslayef.



God of The War. Georgian Kino.

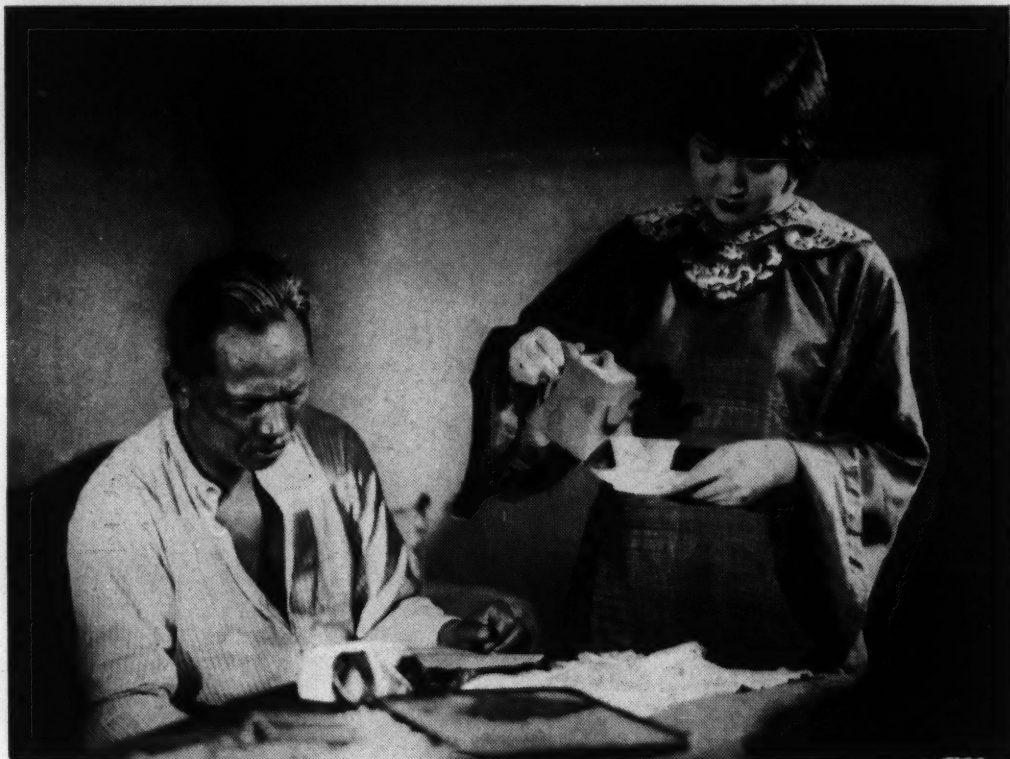


Photo: Hans Casparius

A new film by Erno Metzner. *Where's Love, There's Danger* (*Achtung, Liebe-Lebensgefahr*). Grace Chiang Metzner and Nien Son Ling.



Photo: Hans Casparius

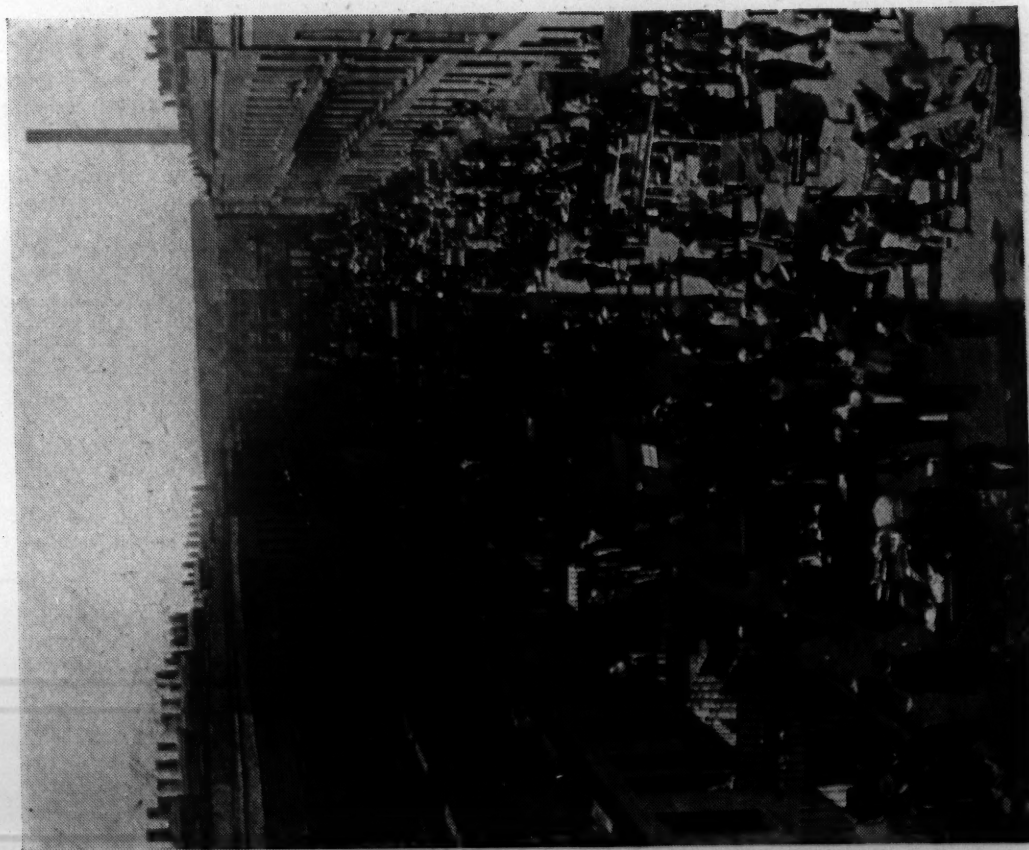
Mr. Bob Stoll and Mrs. Schlichter in Erno Metzner's film.



Where's Love, There's Danger (Achtung, Liebe—Lebensgefahr).



Photos: Hans Casparius



The Royal Borough of Kensington, a film of actuality
by H. P. J. Marshall for the Film Guild of London.



Photô: Ufa
Willy Fritsch as Wolf Helius in the new Fritz Lang
superfilm, *The Girl in the Moon*. An Ufa film.



Photo: Ufa

A street accident in *The Girl in the Moon*. Margaret Kupfer and Gustl Stark-Gstettenbaur.

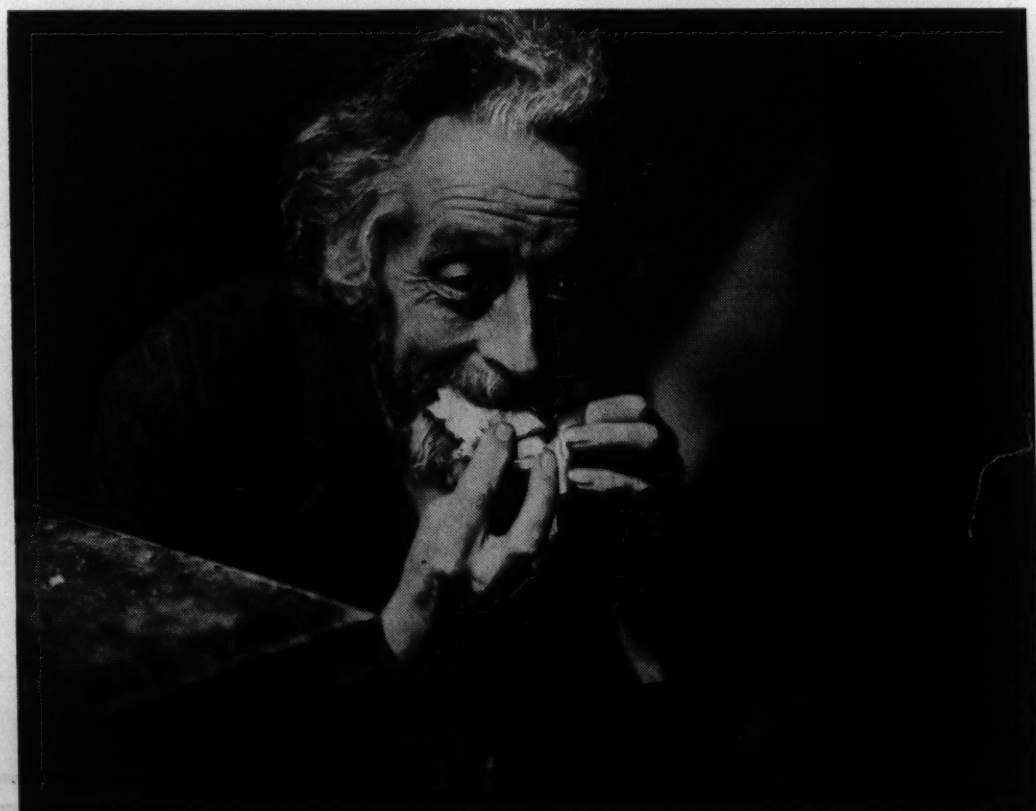


Photo: Ufa

The old professor saved from starvation. Klaus Pohl (Professor Manfeldt) in *The Girl in the Moon*.

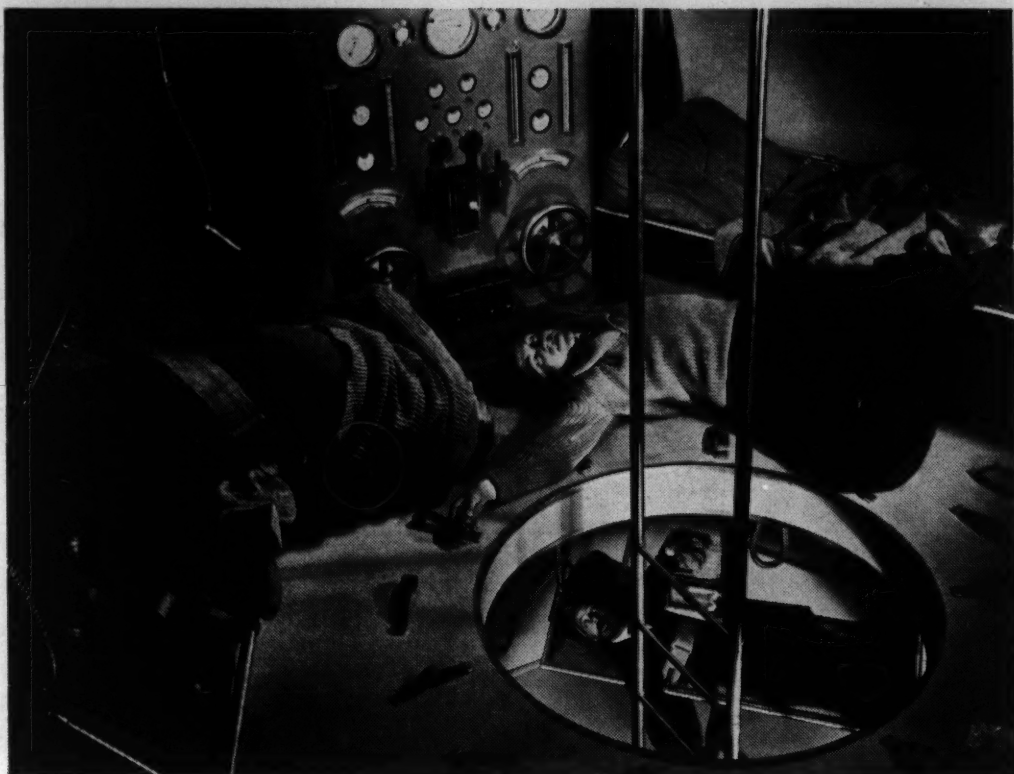


Photo: Ufa

Suffocation in the Rocket journeying to the Moon. Gustav von Wangenheim (Windegger), Willy Fritsch (Wolf Helius) and below the Professor (Klaus Pohl). Fritz Lang's new superfilm for Ufa.
The Girl in the Moon.



Photo: Ufa

A Lunar landscape. Reminiscent of the Icelandic solfaturas are these spitting Lakes, wonderfully constructed for *The Girl in the Moon*.

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the result is sometimes only tentative. That is the philosophically experimental. When Pabst uses his camera non-assertively, I see no such relevant intention, it is something apart—and what is apart in a film purporting to reveal a human adventure, is unscrupulous. That is the artisan's experiment.

This same unscrupulousness is present in Ernst Lubitsch, in Paul Leni, in Fritz Lang. Lubitsch with his "pictorial repartee" (high-school sophomore brand) and his "touches" (see also von Stroheim "the master" and Charlie Chaplin of *A Woman of Paris*)¹, Leni with his decorator's camera-play and smart-boy comics, Lang with his big-scale insipid architecture: the same concern with trivia. The wastes of able craftsmanship in Berger's *The Burning Heart*, in Kurt Bernhardt's *Die Frau nach der man sich sehnt*: what is the cumulative intention here?

The German film *pretends* to tragedy and that accentuates the falsity. Instances are Dupont's *Variety*, and the numerous moral films of Germany, such as *The Woman's Crusade* (*Must She Go On?*) The German penchant for the moral further burdens the pretension. The effect is generally ludicrous, as in the Ucicky film dealing with sterilization, the many "flaming youth" pictures . . . The law of art has not here been understood or even, I fear, suspected: the conversion of the material, which includes the moral idea. Never is the moral intention as offensive as it is in the French film, of a L'Herbier or a Benoit-Levy, for in

¹ I am not now referring to the important contribution of the Chaplin film, but to its gratuitous intelligence.

the German film we sense the honesty of that intention, whereas it is only an *etiquette* of decorative sentimentality in the French film. But the Germans have never learned to embody the moral idea in the unfolding motion picture, as have the Swedes of the great Swedish film period.

Yet in this affection for the moral I find a hope for the German film, once it learns to wed the moral intention with its first victory, the simple theme of general reference (*The Last Laugh, The Street, etc.*) The success is just beginning to expose itself in the stories of children and young folk. The films of children are as yet superior to those dealing with young folk, simply because the problem of the latter is more ponderous. But the fact that the Germans, of all people, care for their children *en masse* promises genuine films of the lives of the children. Max Mack's *Der Kampf der Tertia* is an excellent indication, and the sensitivity of Hans Behrendt's *The Robber Band* is another indicator of hope. The American films of children are most wretched, from *Our Gang* to *The Innocents of Paris*. Childhood is made egregious in them. The French film of children is usually the film of a child and the reference is seldom far-extending (*Poil de Carotte, Gribiche*). Moreover, the French have little sense of the child as child. The Germans, I think, have shown they are best fit to deal with childhood. The group-mind of the German comprehends the child as group-individual and this is fortunate for both the verity of the performance and its cinematic effectiveness, as well as for the child participating (but this is a matter beyond this essay).

There have been accumulating in the German kino for

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years local, domestic films of Berlin low-life (Liedtke in *Wochenendzauber* and Kampers in *Lemkes sel. Witwe*) which should long ago have provided the folk-basis for a great German film comedy. But only recently have we been favoured with the first instance of this awaited comedy, in the film rendering by Hans Behrendt of Carl Sternheim's *Die Hose*, with its blend of grand burlesque and satire, its infusion of the extraordinary—in the person of the court poet—into the ordinary—gloriously done by Werner Krauss. The film made from Hauptmann's *The Beaver Coat* might have been another transcendent comedy, had its director understood the law of the conversion of material, with its two divisions: the retention of the essential narrative and the creation of cinematic correlatives in the performance. Hans Behrendt has understood these two demands adequately.

Two promises remain with the German film. First, the rise of new directors, with the hope that the studio-mind will be modified or new uses will be found for it. Second, the maturity of the German actor. The latter has been constant amid the fluctuations, even non-development, of the German kino. Werner Krauss, Fritz Kortner, Heinrich George, Hans Schlettow, Bernard Goetzke, Wolfgang Zilzer—Asta Nielsen, Grete Mosheim, Henny Porten, numerous others whose names escape me for the moment, performers who fuse with the cinema. The performance of a Grete Mosheim as a *backfisch* reveals what intelligence and talent might do for Clara Bow. These German actors have kept the German film from perishing in the hands of the artisan. If there has been any fault to find with these artists it is that they have

been *too* submissive to the director, although frequently I have felt Werner Krauss setting the pace for his *regisseur*. It is very likely that the German actor will elucidate for the director his legitimate art, by clarifying for him the nature of cinema performance. The German director has been, like the German schoolmaster of the past, the sort of disciplinarian who believes in getting the most out of his pupil. He demanded Mehr, mehr! So that very often the actor became apoplectic. Jannings and Veidt are typical instances. Fortunately, in *The Last Laugh* the co-ordination and convergence of the environment upon Jannings served as a rein and Jannings was brought back into the film and a powerful unity was preserved.

In this consideration, I mentioned at several points the bluntness of German presentations as revealed in their moralizations, in their fantasies, etc. I assemble these evidences of bluntness under the general head of simplism. It is a term I have used many times in these pages, and which, I believe, my readers will understand by connotation. If we take the fantasy of *Caligari* and compare it with that of *Die Hose* we will note the difference in the categories. *Caligari's* narration contains no intricacy, no larger reference . . . it is *Peer Gynt* without the philosophy and the poetry of the Ibsen drama. Am I stretching my comparison? Certainly, deliberately. I wish to indicate where the Germans have gone for their experience of the fantastic. To *Torgus*. These fantastic narratives—these fantastic films, ended with themselves. Epstein's *The Fall of the House of Usher* rises to a sense of universe-torment. Stiller's *The Treasure of Arne* was the poignancy of the primitive. Yet

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The Treasure of Arne was a very simple film, its intricacies were in its transcendental references, in its experience.¹

In *Die Hose* we find a very simple narrative, but the references save the film from the simplism which is the tale only and nothing more. The secret lies in the unconcern of the German directors for the experience of the unit, the theme and its references. Again we may compare with *The Treasure of Arne* a German film, made from Sudermann's *The Cat's Bridge*. All the appearances of tragedy but no tragedy in this latter film. Or the film made from another Sudermann, *Dame Care*. What is the meaning of these films? What do they intend? That they intend no peculiar experience is evident in their impurity. The film is constantly blemished by parts of the narrative that have no place in it. If the film cannot rise above its source, it certainly can fall below it. An instance of this decline is the Zelnik cinematization of Hauptmann's *The Weavers*. Captions alone cannot make a film universal. What did Zelnik intend here? What was his social apprehension of the theme, and what form should this apprehension take in the film? There is no evidence that he asked himself these questions. This was another film-job.

The German film-directors who have gone to America have

¹ Further studies in simplism German-style are: *The Three Wax-Figures*, *Warning Shadows*, *Secrets of a Soul*, and *The Man with the Tree-Frog*. I especially include the other as an evidence of German bluntness. Here is a mystery-play where the mystery is not introduced until the film is well-nigh ended, and immediately solved. In other words, here is a mystery-play without a mystery. Which is mystery enough, I suppose. Murnau's *Tartuffe* is an instance of a great idea gone stodgy because of simplism.

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brought with them this job-mind. That is why they have not found Hollywood detrimental. The job-mind is adaptive. Not so with the Swedish directors. Their minds are experience-minds. The level between the work of a Sjöström or a Stiller in Sweden and his work in Hollywood tells the story I'm after. I regret the presence of a Lubitsch in Hollywood. His sophistication was not our need. The job-mind only abets the American job-mind. Leni may have interested some American directors in objects, but that is enough: he interested them only in the movements of objects, not in their quality. The Americans know enough about literal movements, they need to learn analysis for quality. Murnau might have taught our directors some necessary things. Vidor might have learned something from him in the way of ordered rhythms. But what the Fox Pictures seems to have learned from the Germans is only the rising mist of the atmospheric photography. The presence of an Emil Jannings has, I believe, helped toward emphasizing, if only a very little, the right of the mature actor, a Jean Hersholt for instance. Handsomeness is no longer the only criterion. We have not yet, in America, attained to a wish beyond the one-type performer, the caricature. It is significant that we have imported no Werner Krauss and no Fritz Kortner. But that is an American story.

HARRY A. POTAMKIN.

FREUD ON THE FILMS

Far away back in April (1929) *Close Up* welcomed Metzner's *Uberfall*, and described it as "a beautiful flow of images without break or jerk, catching the essence of Freudian nightmare." Later, L. Saalschutz, in a most interesting article, discussed the film in its relation to the unconscious. There remains Germaine Dulac's *The Sea-Shell and the Clergyman*.

When Mr. Stuart Davis, the enterprising, had it brought hopefully to London, we hastened to investigate.

Now that so many stage plays are being screened it was good to see a psychoanalytical exposition of thought, for the stage cannot show the layers upon layers of simultaneous consciousness. The stage cannot acquire the mobility of the subconscious, or put over as effectively the utter grotesqueness, so essential to dream states, which trick photography can capture on the screen. Piscator, and others, have tried by splitting the proscenium into sections, but the results have always been ponderous, they lack this flow, this ebb, this rhythm of the cinema.

Germaine Dulac's picture begins with a door, a high and narrow slit of a door, casting a shaft of light on to the floor of blackness. Here is the same lesson that I found in *The*

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Eleventh Year (Close Up, Vol. 5. No. 2.), that light is creating, that light is doing something on the screen. All put, in cinematic terms, very neatly. See, there is a square door and a round pool of light. How you have to watch for the little things in this kind of picture! There are no laws in this fourth dimension, just light doing things. Square door, round pool.

The clergyman sits at a table pouring liquid, from a shell, into a series of retorts, which, after he has filled, he throws to the ground. Symbolism, obvious.

Smoke flows over the fragments of the glass.

A man appears in the cell, he comes through a gaping door; an intruder wearing a uniform, standing for Authority. He arrests the cleric in his monotonous actions. The setting of the cell makes it clear that these are the things the clergyman has shut away in his mind, and Authority, or Public Opinion, forbids him to dwell on them. The unfortunate falls to the floor. He creeps about feeling so much less than the others, he has his vow of celibacy.

Startling change from the studio set, he is crawling down a real street. In his life, as distinct from his suppressed desires, he feels inferior.

Houses are placed over one another by quick mixes.

The groveller notices Authority driving, in a cab, with a woman. It infuriates the clergyman to think that this man may have, lawfully, that which is denied to him by his vows. He chases the couple, and tracks them down in a church. In slow motion, the movement of a dream state, he approaches. This is his territory, the church.

Always the woman's face is shown as a chocolate-box type.

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She gazes on vaguely while the clergyman strangles her partner.

A close up shows the face of the attacked. Threads of blood trickle down the nose; threads that become wires to pull the face into two parts. Nightmare. Poetical waters of horror fill the screen. The clergyman is revealed with the other floating in his arms. (Under the water sensation).

A great quarry. The clergyman on the skyline. His old enemy appears at his side, frenzied he hurls him to destruction in the waters beneath.

The water motif over, space is bridged with the rapidity of the unconscious. Back in the church the clergyman tears the clothing from the woman's breasts. Shells appear to cover her breasts.

Men and women dance crazily in a room; the candelabra spins madly. Authority and the woman enter and mount a throne. Materializing from space the clergyman, who is holding a shell in his hand, watches the dancers embracing. Hurling the shell to the floor he sees it explode in smoke.

The tails of the clergyman's frock grow into flowing trains: his rank, his vows.

Down corridors, and by a stream he pursues the woman. The woman turns and jeers. She puts out her tongue.

Lights in a crystal globe remind of lights in the retorts. He beckons to the woman to come and look in the globe, she refuses. Symbolism, obvious.

He has a key in his hand. He swings the key in a complicated figure. Opening door after door he finds the rooms empty.

At rest in a hammock, while Authority sits in a warehouse,

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the clergyman yet manages to watch the woman materializing from the sky. There are no laws of time and space. Now the clergyman feels that he could kill the capricious woman. Between his hands models of houses and castles are superimposed: symbols of his burning wishes for domestic happiness. Follows pure imagery. Ships, with beautiful sails, float on a sea so still that only the imagination could see it. Silver curtains, ships.

Maids clean the floor. Starting a new phase. The crystal stands in the room. Men enter. The clergyman is married to the woman by Authority dressed as a parson. Castles, houses, boats, and silver nets. The crystal grows larger, crashes to the floor. In the wreckage the face of Authority.

The scenario was written by Antonin Artaud. If one could do it justice in mere words it would not be such a good film.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

MAKING A FILM OF THE ACTUAL

A PROBLEM IN FILM CONSTRUCTION.

(Reprinted from *The Clarion*).

The editor asks me to say something about a film I completed two or three months ago. It is not for a producer to

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talk too solidly about his own work, so I shall tell you about the job itself rather than the result. The film will be going its own rounds presently, and whoever of you wander down the back streets may judge for themselves. They will, I hope, find it among the westerns and the other proletarians. There it belongs.

It is about the sea and about fishermen, and there is not a Piccadilly actor in the piece. The men do their own acting, and the sea does its—and if the result does not bear out the 107th Psalm, it is my fault. Men at their labour are the salt of the earth; the sea is a bigger actor than Jannings or Nitikin or any of them; and if you can tell me a story more plainly dramatic than the gathering of the ships for the herring season, the going out, the shooting at evening, the long drift in the night, the hauling of nets by infinite agony of shoulder muscle in the teeth of a storm, the drive home against a head sea, and (for finale) the frenzy of a market in which said agonies are sold at ten shillings a thousand, and iced, salted and barrelled for an unwitting world—if you can tell me a story with a better crescendo in energies, images, atmospherics and all that make up the sum and substance of cinema, I promise you I shall make a film of it when I can.

First Essentials.

But, of course, making a film is not just the simple matter of feeling the size of the material. If that were so every fool who fusses over a nondescript sunset or bares his solar plexus to the salt sea waves on his summer holiday, would be an artist. I do not claim the brave word, though I would

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like to, but I think I know what it mostly means. It has very little to do with nondescript enthusiasm, and a great deal to do with a job of work.

In art, as in everything else, the gods are with the big battalions. You march on your subject with a whole regiment of energies: you surround it, you break in here, break in there, and let loose all the shell and shrapnel you can (by infinite pushing of your inadequate noddle) lay hands on. Out of the labour something comes. All you have to do then is to seize what you want. If you have really and truly got inside, you will have plenty—of whatever it is—to choose from.

So in this rather solid adventure of the herring fishery I did what I could to get inside the subject. I had spent a year or two of my life wandering about on the deep sea fishing boats, and that was an initial advantage. I knew what they felt like. Among other things they had developed in me a certain superior horsemanship which was proof against all bronco-buckings, side-steppings and rollings whatsoever. I mention this because the limiting factor in all sea films is the stomach of the director and his cameramen. It is a super fact, beyond all art and non-art. Of my cameramen one also was an ex-seaman. The other, for all his bravery, was mostly unconscious.

In this matter I was altogether to blame. What I know of cinema I have learned partly from the Russians, partly from the American westerns, and partly from Flaherty, of *Nanook*. The westerns give you some notion of the energies. The Russians give you the energies and the

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intimacies both. And Flaherty is a poet. The net effect of this cinematic upbringing was to make me want a storm: a real storm, an intimate storm, and if possible a rather noble storm. I waited in Lowestoft for weeks till the gale signal went up, and I got it. So did the cameramen. The wild Arabian breeze of a drifter's bilges did not help matters.

The Energies.

Taking the film as a whole I got the essentials of what I wanted. I got the most beautiful fishing village in the world—I found it in the Shetlands—for a starting point. I staged my march to the sea, the preparations, the procession out. I ran in detail of furnace and engine-room for image of force, and seas over a headland for image of the open. I took the ships out and cast the nets in detail. As to the rope over the cradle, the boy below, the men on deck against the sea; as to the rhythm of the heaving, the run on the rollers, the knotted haul of each float and net; as to the day and approaching night; as to the monotony of long labour. Two miles of nets to a ship: I threw them in a flood of repetition against a darkening sky.

The life of Natural cinema is in this massing of detail, in this massing of all the rhythmic energies that contribute to the blazing fact of the matter. Men and the energies of men, things and the functions of things, horizons and the poetics of horizons: these are the essential materials. And one must never grow so drunk with the energies and the functions to forget the poetics.

I had prepared against that as best I knew how. Image for this, image for that. For the settling of darkness, not

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darkness itself, but flocks of birds silhouetted against the sky flying hard into the camera: repeated and repeated. For the long drift in the night, not the ship, not the sea itself, but the dark mystery of the underwater. I made the night scene a sequence of rushing shoals and contorting congers. For the dawn, not a bleary fuss against the sky (which in cinema is nothing), but a winding slow-rolling movement into the light. Then a bell-buoy. Then a Dutch lugger rolling heavily into the light. Three images in a row.

You can never have your images too great, and I think there are none of us poets enough to make cinema properly. It is in the end a question of suggesting things and all the example of Shakespearian metaphor is there to tell you how short we stand of the profundities.

The most solid scene, I would say, was the spectacle of the hauling. Camera and cameraman were lashed on top of the wheelhouse, and the nets came up through the heavy sea in great drifts of silver. We got at it from every angle we could and shot it inside out with the hand camera; and, put together, it made a brave enough show. But even then the fact of the matter, however detailed, however orchestrated, was not enough. The sea might lash over the men and the ship plunge, and the haul of the nets tauten and tear at the wrists of the men: it was still not enough. This business of horizons had to be faced over again. By fortune a whale came alongside to clean the nets, and I used it for more than a whale. I used it for a ponderous symbol of all that tumbled and laboured on that wild morning. It adds something, but it is possible that some-

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thing else, had I but felt it properly, would have carried the scene still further to that horizon I speak of. Images, images—details and aspects of things that lift a world of fact to beauty and bravery—no doubt half a hundred passed under my nose, and I did not see them.

Processions and Images.

So through the procession into harbour, and the scenes in the market place at Yarmouth—fact joined to fact and detail to detail. But here, of course, because of the size and variety of the scene, rather greater possibilities in the matter of orchestration. The gathering procession of buyers and sellers on the quayside, the procession of ships through the harbour mouth: the two processions interwoven. The selling itself, the unloading the carrying: mouth work and shoulder work interwoven, made complementary to each other, opposed to each other as your fancy takes you. Rivers of fish, being slid into a ship's hold, cartfuls of baskets, girls gutting, barrels being rolled: all the complex detail of portage and export dissolved into each other, run one on top of the other, to set them marching. It is the procession of results. Cranes and ships and railway trains—or their impressionistic equivalents—complete it.

The problem of images does not arise so plainly here, for cinematic processions, if you bring them off, are solid affairs that carry their own banners. Two, however, I did try. As the labour of the sea turned to the labour of the land, I carried forward a wave theme. It is played heavily for accompaniment as the ships ride in; but as life on the

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quayside takes charge of the picture, it is diminished in strength till it vanishes altogether. Through breaking waves the buyers and sellers go to their business. Count that, if you will, for an image of opposition. It is a far cry from the simple and solid labour of the sea to the nep-man haggling of the market place.

The last was of a similar type. As the catch was being boxed and barrelled I thought I would like to say that what was really being boxed and barrelled was the labour of men. So as the herring were shovelled in, and the ice, laid on, and the hammer raised to complete the job, I slid back for a flash or two to the storm and the hauling. The hammer is raised on mere fish: it comes down on dripping oilskins and a tumbling sea. This notion I kept repeating in flashes through the procession of barrels and the final procession of railway trucks. The barrels of the dead pass for a second into the living swirl of a herring shoal, in and out again; the smoke in a tunnel dissolves for a moment into the tautened wrist of a fisherman at the net-rope.

I cannot tell you what the result of it all is. Notions are notions and pictures are pictures, and no knowledge of cinematic anatomy can guarantee that extra something which is the breath of life to a picture. If I raise this matter of images it is rather to give you some idea of how the movie mind works. It has to feel its way through the appearances of things, choosing, discarding and choosing again, seeking always those more significant appearances which are like yeast to the plain dough of the context. Sometimes they are there for the taking; as often as not you have to make a journey into a far country to find them.

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That, however, is no more difficult for cinema than for poetry. The camera is by instinct, if not by training, a wanderer.

JOHN GRIERSON.

(Mr. Grierson's film, *Drifters*—a New Era production—will be shown together with *Potemkin* at the first performance of the Film Society in London, on November 10th. *Ed.*)

LOSS AND PROFIT

Back of many a big Hollywood success lies a record of prodigious failures. Partly these failures may be due to circumstance, but chiefly they are the result of that naïve incompetence which is one of Hollywood's astonishing charms. It is never a cause of any serious worry. Whatever troubles, setbacks, disappointments or financial losses it may involve, Hollywood always presents a smiling face to the world. And well it may, for it has learned the secret of making the world pay for its mistakes.

Let a picture cost five times more than it reasonably should have cost, and Hollywood, instead of bewailing the waste of time and money, optimistically turns it to account by putting the picture on the market as a "super-production." Its tremendous cost is frankly blazoned on

the billboards. And the world, instinctively assuming that a picture which involved an outlay of two million dollars must necessarily be better than one made for a beggarly four hundred thousand, responds with proportionately increased patronage.

Hollywood is a past master of human psychology. Hence its unfailing optimism. It has created the only business in the history of man wherein failure, blunder, incompetence, and inefficiency are transmutable into assets.

Any number of outstanding pictures whose costs have averaged over a million dollars each, might be cited in illustration of the success of this pragmatic optimism. *Ben-Hur*, perhaps, is as interesting an example as any. At all events, it is one of the most striking, in that it continues to hold the record for expensiveness of production.

In the first place, a small fortune in cash was paid for the picture rights to this great story of Lew Wallace's, in addition to a royalty contract calling for fifty per cent. of the revenues from the film. And this for the chief purpose of putting the famous chariot race on the screen. The rest of the story was regarded merely as so much ballast.

For some reason never yet explained, a large company of players, writers, technicians, cameramen and assistants, together with a vast amount of impedimenta, was dispatched to Rome to film the picture. After a year's work there, characterized chiefly by delays, obstacles, and misunderstandings, and during which the original director and scenario writer, as well as several of the leading players, were replaced and ordered home, the entire outfit was

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brought back to Hollywood (that is, Culver City, to be specific).

The chief purpose of this expensive trip to Rome had been to film the chariot race in the great circus described in the novel. The reason for returning without having accomplished this purpose may have been the discovery on somebody's part that this circus was located in Antioch. Perhaps the oversight had been due to the fact that the civilized world in the time of Christ was commonly referred to as Rome, and as Hollywood producers are too busy creating history themselves to be mindful of the work of others in this field, they may innocently have assumed that the scenes of *Ben-Hur* were laid in the only Rome with which they were acquainted.

At any rate, that is where they at first thought it proper to film the picture, notwithstanding that no single incident in the story is laid in the city of Rome. By the time they changed their minds and brought the company back, a cost of two or three millions had been charged against the picture, with little or nothing to show for it. The greater part of the Roman film was discarded, and the *piece de resistance* of the picture, the Antioch circus, was built in Culver City at a cost of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and the great chariot race put on there, with seventy-five thousand citizens of Los Angeles playing the part of holiday onlookers, each being provided gratis with appropriate costume and make-up. And this having been successfully accomplished on home territory, the picture was subsequently completed in and around the studio.

Four million dollars is the advertised cost of *Ben-Hur*.

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With proper preparation, foresight, and knowledge it might easily have been made for less than one-fourth that sum. As a picture it lacks any of the elements of greatness. Its one redeeming feature is the spectacle of the race, which is undeniably a masterpiece of cinematic craft. And this, together with a clever exploiting of the stupendous cost of the picture, has "put over" the film and made it a success.

Why, then, be critical of Hollywood extravagance? On the contrary, its exploitation as a means of turning a deficit into an asset—of raising a mediocre picture to the rank of a superlative production—cannot but challenge our wonderment and admiration, if not our envy.

As already stated, *Ben-Hur* is not an exceptional case, save for the actual amount of extravagance and incompetence involved. Cinema history abounds in these examples of waste and prefatory failures in the filming of eventually successful pictures.

Nor have the talkies, despite their inherent demand for more careful preparation, brought about any appreciable modification of this basic characteristic condition. Sometime next year the world will be regaled with a colourful musical production, under the probable title of *The King of Jazz*. It will be built about Paul Whiteman and his famous jazz orchestra. According to schedule, it should have been completed by this time. As a matter of fact, it has not yet started and has already cost its producers, the Universal Company, not less than three hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

The terms of Universal's contract with Whiteman offer an interesting example of the extent to which producers will

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financially obligate themselves in their desire to secure a popular feature for film production. In the present instance these terms include a cash payment to Whiteman of fifty thousand dollars upon the signing of the contract; another fifty thousand upon his arrival at the studio; still another fifty thousand upon the completion of the picture; and yet another fifty thousand on the day of the picture's release. Also, a salary of five thousand dollars a week during the two months he was scheduled to be at the studio, with a supplemental eight thousand a week for his men. And as a further recognition of his value as a public attraction, the contract stipulates that he is to receive forty per cent. of the picture's profits, in addition to the various cash payments already recited.

The contract was signed last November, and in preparation for the making of the picture, which the contract stipulated should begin on the 21st of June, Universal spent much ready cash. This included a big price to two authors for a collaborated story to fit the already selected title, *The King of Jazz*, and an expenditure of ninety thousand dollars for the building of a vast futuristic set called for by the scenario—a set, which, like many another before it, is said to be the largest ever constructed on a studio stage. Besides, as a matter of gratuity and a show of good will, the company prepared a sound-proof bungalow for Mr. Whiteman's personal accommodation, in which as part of its elaborate equipment were installed a special cooling system and a five-thousand-dollar grand piano. Also, a special lodge was built on the studio lot for the accommodation of the orchestra members.

When Mr. Whiteman arrived at the studio—incidentally receiving fifty thousand dollars for so doing—he glanced over the scenario that had been prepared for him, and promptly rejected it—a right accorded him under the contract. In a feverish effort to please the jazz maestro, the best Hollywood story talent was called in and ordered forthwith to write something that would fit Mr. Whiteman, as well as the ninety-thousand-dollar futuristic set and the publicly announced title of *The King of Jazz*.

But all in vain. There was no satisfying Mr. Whiteman; and after gracing the lot for the time called for in the contract, he and his men picked up their saxophones and other weird instruments and hied them hence, with a hundred and thirty thousand dollars in their collective pockets as salary for doing nothing.

According to the present understanding, Mr. Whiteman will return in November and look over the stories which will be prepared for him in the meantime, and if any one of them appeals to him as worthy, the making of the picture will proceed from that date. And when it is released we may look for some superlative announcements in praise of it, with special emphasis on the cost of this mammoth and peerless production.

Life in Hollywood is not all roses. Much there is of thorny trouble and worriment which the finished picture never reveals. The public must be served, and the producers are never unmindful of their duty on this score, whatever the cost. That a little more system, a little more thought and calculation, a little more intelligence might obviate many of their worries and expenses, is neither here nor there.

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Hollywood is as it is. With its perennial optimism and its skill in converting losses into profits, it needs neither our sympathy nor criticism.

CLIFFORD HOWARD.

FINDS

If "seeing's believing", it is easy to imagine that every scene which flashes or flickers across our line of vision at the local cinema, has not necessarily been studied from the point of view of balance by the Producer. Otherwise we should have been spared a great deal of mental anguish.

On the other hand, considering this, it is astonishing how from time to time, a perfectly lovely sequence is evolved in a film, which in every other respect is unworthy of exhibition.

These scenes, infrequent as they may be, are due to nature rather than art, it usually must be admitted. In the average woolly west drama the plot is negligible, the acting hardly equivalent to that of a church amateur dramatic society, and details of acting, make-up, etc., are cheerfully ignored by all concerned. If it is your hard lot, therefore, to have to sit through one of these efforts, it is generally possible to learn a useful lesson from the scenery of the "great, open spaces".

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Perhaps the scene is a rocky pass, barren of vegetation and having only a couple of men or horses in the foreground. Uncompromising? Very. But there are sermons in stones and you will probably find that the jagged outlines of the rocks make an ideal background for the flowing, easy movements of the horses. The contrast in forms unconsciously serves to feed the mind's eye, apart from any action which may be taking place in connection with the plot, and is strangely reminiscent of modern interior designs used in some German films, which have taken a good deal of thought for their rhythmic design.

Another instance can be found in a typical slapstick comedy. Here there has obviously been no attempt at creating a well balanced picture. The object of the film is amusement of a particularly unsubtle type. Yet once again—"Good in Everything." Observe the wreckage of the room round which the fat man has been chased by the little man with that funny moustache. Curtains torn from their hangings fall in folds which would have delighted an old master. The wreckage of the dresser and china forms a heap which would, in all probability prove an inspiration to a Russian poster designer. The abandon of the attitude of the fat man who has now been stunned by the chandelier falling on his head, is a study in unforced and easy lines which contrasts pleasantly with the stilted "art" interior in which the action has been staged.

Or, if you are compelled to suffer in silence through the seven reels of a soul-stirring drama which has obviously been produced in a hurry and with an eye to economy, instead of fuming and fretting, devote your attention to

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admiring the shadows which fall away from the amazing moon-lit spot in which the action is taking place. More often than not, you will find their soothing lines a relief from the exaggerated poses of the players.

If the scene is taking place in a haunted house, forgers' den or fog-bound docks—these things always happen at night—there is usually the unaffected and unpremeditated beauty of those shadows, for the action is sure to be enlivened and emphasized by a lantern or street light glowing through the gloom.

By watching for these little acts of grace it is possible to extract a certain amount of—well—interest, even from the worst of films, and there is rather a thrill in appreciating something which probably no one else in the theatre has discovered.

Perhaps, however, you can go to a cinema which does not show that kind of film, in which case, you will have been spared the agony of sitting through an indifferent programme filler for the sake of watching a really good "big" picture. All the same, you will have missed my thrill of discovery.

D. L. H.

"THIS MONTAGE BUSINESS"

The Film Guild of London, an amateur organisation, is suffering from a bad attack of "this montage business". The phrase in quotes is not mine; one of the members of the Guild aptly but thoughtlessly employed it at their meeting last month when several recent productions of the Guild were screened.

Chief among these was *Waitress*, produced on 9 mm. stock by Mr. Orlton West. *Waitress* is a bad film, very bad. Originally it was made as a one-reeler, but after he had made it Mr. West went to the Continent and saw the work of Vertof. He was so impressed with Vertof's montage that he came back, added another reel to his film, and endeavoured to cut the whole production in the Vertoff manner.

Now cutting, or montage as some people prefer to call it, is something more than clipping every possible shot to a couple of frames. Cutting should be composed, and Mr. West has neither composed his film nor his cutting. The result is a striving after effect purely. If the director had paid a little more attention to his lighting and photography (which were terribly poor), and to his story construction, and less to stunts, *Waitress* might have been a better film. The very long and almost unintelligible double exposure sequence which attempts to express the mental collapse of the girl in

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the cafe could well have been dispensed with, or, at least, shortened considerably.

This desperate endeavour to be clever in order to be different also spoilt *Fade Out*, a first effort by Miss Norah Cutting. (The name is quite genuine, I believe!) This short has possibilities, but again is almost ruined by "this montage business". Its climax, when the man who is helping an amateur company on location falls from the tree and dies, is killed by a rapid succession of closely cut shots which the mind positively refuses to follow. The weather conditions under which the film was made were obviously bad, and this should have been taken into consideration when *Fade Out* was edited. If Vertoff had been working under similar conditions, he would never have attempted to do what the director of *Fade Out* has done. Film Guilders, please note!

In case I be misunderstood, let me say that the members of the Film Guild are honestly endeavouring to do good work, but they are afflicted with an attitude which can best be described as posing. Everybody recognises the difficult conditions under which the British amateurs have to work to-day. But these difficulties cannot always be used as an excuse for careless work. Carelessness is impermissible in amateur production.

The Guild is certainly working towards something, and most of its work is experimental, but in doing so it is wasting a terrible amount of time and energy. *Gaiety of Nations*, an amateur film reviewed by me in *Close Up* last month took over six months to make, and it was worth it. I am not suggesting that every amateur film should take a similar

length of time, but the lesson to be learned from *Gaiety of Nations* is that adequate care, thought and attention must be given to all amateur productions if the British amateur film movement is to compete successfully with similar movements on the Continent and in the U.S.A.

Hastily conceived and shoddily constructed work will only bring discredit.

R. BOND.

VOIR ET ENTENDRE !

Le film sonore n'est plus un mystère pour les cinéphiles genevois. L'Alhambra vient de projeter successivement *Le Chanteur de Jazz*, *L'Escadre Volante*, *La Paiva*, *Les Nouvelles Vierges* et *La Divine Lady*, avec diverses attractions sonores : concerts de jazz, extraits d'opéras chantés par Martinelli, duos d'instruments divers. Comme partout, enthousiasme délirant du public pour *Le Chanteur de Jazz* qui inaugurerait à Genève l'invention de la Western Electric. L'on applaudit à tout rompre et ce d'autant plus facilement que le film s'applaudissait lui-même avec une énergie tout américaine. Chacun ouvrit toutes grandes ses oreilles pour saisir tout ce que pouvait bien chanter ce brave Jolson à sa little Mammy, sur un air à la fois déchirant et irrésistible. Si le sens des paroles échappait à la majorité des spectateurs,

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aucun doute, cependant, n'était possible quant aux sentiments qui devaient agiter le chanteur de jazz. Deux ténors chantèrent, dans la même soirée, un fragment des *Pêcheurs de Perles*, de Bizet. On ne peut, en vérité, rien imaginer de plus ébouriffant ! Devant un décor de petit théâtre de province, deux hommes chantent, ma foi fort bien, en gesticulant de grotesque façon. On pose la main sur son cœur, on tend le bras droit vers l'horizon, on roule des yeux furibonds . . . le spectateur gêné par ces naïves démonstrations, ferme les yeux ou laisse tomber son regard sur une photogénique voisine. Passons !

Le vrombissement des moteurs de *L'Escadre Volante* fut une diversion qui enchantait tous ceux qui n'estiment pas suffisant le vacarme des klaxons, des panatropes, des sirènes d'usines et du haut-parleur de la concierge. Ramon Novarro retint pourtant assez longtemps quelques spectatrices ; elles endurèrent patiemment le bourdonnement des avions pour contempler leur cher *Ben-Hur*.

La Paiva est de Griffith ; c'est déjà plus rassurant et si l'on veut être impartial, il faut reconnaître que la prise de vues est très bonne. Les mélodies larmoyantes de Lupe Velez émurent et plurent beaucoup, encore que l'amplification déforme le son et provoque ici et là quelques vibrations défectueuses de la voix.

Un titre scabreux comme *Les Nouvelles Vierges* ne pouvait manquer d'attirer une foule de curieux. Voir et entendre, c'est sûrement plus échauffant encore. On vit Joan Crawford, Dorothy Sebastian et Anita Page, mais on ne les entendit point. Et au nombre de ces nouvelles vierges, que de petits cerveaux acquis à la morale la plus intransigeante. *Our*

Dancing Daughters n'aurait pas dû être traduit de la sorte.

Enfin *La Divine Lady*, avec Nelson et Lady Hamilton, Varconi et Corinne Griffith. Passe encore Varconi qui donne de Nelson une figure assez satisfaisante, mais qui aura pourtant un oeil de trop pour incarner, sur le tard, le Baron du Nil. Mais Corinne Griffith n'entre guère dans la peau de son héroïne. Corinne Griffith a trop souci de sa "respectability" pour cela. Elle chante ici et là, comme par hasard, joue de la harpe, se fait accompagner d'un pianiste qui tire de son instrument . . . ô merveille des harmonies de violoncelle ! Quand les matelots de Nelson, très échauffés, poussent de frénétiques hurrahs, l'on se représente assez bien ce que doivent être les ovations qui honorent, après un match de base-ball, les vainqueurs.

Nous n'avons eu encore que des Warner Brothers ; que seront les talkies anglais, allemands et français, l'avenir nous l'apprendra. Pour le moment du moins le film sonore n'a pas acquis une forme réellement intéressante. L'on s'étonne, à bon droit, de n'entendre que chanter. Les textes subsistent comme par le passé, et les quelques bruits que l'on s'est plu, jusqu'ici, à insérer dans l'accompagnement musical, ne parlent qu'à l'oreille.

Pour juger équitablement un film dit sonore, nous devons encore dégager l'image de la parole, du chant et des bruits. Ce faisant nous constatons que la mise en scène est moins soignée qu'auparavant, que le scénario est généralement peu fouillé . . . et que les scènes de plein-air ont presque totalement disparu. Recul technique évident, donc, du film muet utilisé comme instrument sonore. Quant aux sons, il nous paraît que ce fameux synchronisme n'a pas toute l'importance

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qu'on lui accorde. C'est là une affaire de mise au point, un détail technique qui, une fois réglé, ne subit aucune variation. Personne, en conversant, ne s'inquiète du synchronisme, et l'on ne prête attention qu'au sens et à la portée des mots. Le synchronisme réalisé, l'instrument perfectionné, reste l'utilisation. Et tout dépend, ce me semble, de ce que l'on veut montrer, faire entendre. Là encore un éclectisme éclairé est nécessaire, là encore il faut savoir laisser de côté l'insignifiant et se borner à ne reproduire que ce qui peut enrichir le sujet visuel. On use actuellement du film sonore comme un violoniste débutant use de son instrument ; avant de se livrer à l'étude du solfège, l'on s'essaye à en tirer les accents les plus divers et les moins harmonieux, l'on gratte, l'on égratigne les oreilles du voisin, l'on s'assure que les cordes rendent bien un son différent. Patience, l'on grattera bien encore quelque temps, mais le diable serait qu'une harmonie ne finisse par en sortir.

F. CHEVALLEY.

COMMENT AND REVIEW

FILMS IN HISTORY.—No. 5.

Blind Husbands. A Von Stroheim Production.

Von Stroheim always has a good story to tell : Stroheim is a good story.

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In his first picture, *Blind Husbands*, his cigarettes are not so long and exotic, nor his uniforms as upholstered; but Stroheim's atmosphere of condescending to appear in the flicks, his wonderfully kept-up Court-of-the-Emperor bearing, proves itself an enduring receipt.

The public has to tire of seductions by moonlight, of Stroheimesque seductions in orchards laden with blossoms or in palatial chambers, before a Stroheim picture can be sent to the destructor.

Scenes in the Tyrolean Alps are quite thrilling. We know, more or less, what will happen; that never was any argument against a movie situation.

A pretty wife who is neglected by her noble, honourable, (what do you know about that?) upright husband; an old friend of the husband, with unshaven face, carved German pipe, and a habit of spitting each time the scenario calls for atmosphere; and Stroheim *personally* appearing in the picture and *personally* directing it. Stroheim putting the scent behind his ears, kicking a dog which gets in his way (or perhaps not in this one), and watching a religious demonstration. Then Stroheim, the wife, the husband, the faithful friend, all on the mountain. And what more could you want? or rather, what more could Stroheim want? Not, I hope, the titles about mountains, and men's souls, and the purity under the beast's clothing.

In ten years' time the Shaftesbury Avenue Pavilion might revive it again: the years will certainly add to its value as history.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

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TALKING STILLS.

Some people have been apt to set a little too much importance on stills. They do, unquestionably, mean a lot. From the stills of *The Rose of Pu Chui* one could get the quality of the film, the Chinese way of fitting their architecture, customs, and dress to their faces.

The danger is to forget the time progression, and to stress the purely sculptural qualities.

Remember, at the beginning of *Storm Over Asia*, the Mongolian ancient squatting in some slumberous form of a primitive cart? Superficially the old man seems to be ornamental, an introduction of the people of the land after the scenery. One could, quite profitably, analyse the composition from this angle. One might find a rhythm of planes in the lines of the draperies, culminating in the wrinkles of the faces. Really though the important point, the Pudovkin point, the building in time, is that a sequence illustrating the joys of the chase has just closed. The calm of the philosophic ancient is a visual comment on the active excitements of the chase.

With talking pictures greater care must be exercised in judging stills. Will, in future, all stills carry the words of spoken dialogue written under the picture? And when a film has one of these sound-noise-dialogue-music scores of Meisel, will a few bars of the music be added at the side? At first glance it is not a bright future for stills which do not give us movement or sound.

O. B.

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THE SCREEN FINDS ITS TONGUE.

BOOK REVIEW.

The Screen Finds Its Tongue. By Fitzhugh Green.
(Putman's. 10/6.)

And they multiply. Mr. Green's contribution is much more of the novel than the other talkie text books. There is a seesaw interest. Will the Warner Brothers make the grade? Will they? They made *The Jazz Singer*.

Now that the Brothers Warner have taken the old place of D. W. Griffiths it is interesting to see their photographs.

Who would have thought that Jack Warner, at the age of fifteen, sang songs in Newcastle (Pennsylvania) for the illustrated slides projected by one of the family? But, to quote Mr. Green, "Jack, though very young at the time, was soon to prove the more temperamental, *artistic* one of the four. He shared with Harry a sense of the drama: he was a born *showman*."

Need I add the italics are mine?

O. B.

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CENSORSHIP.

Ivor Montague's pamphlet "The Political Censorship of Films" (Gollancz—One shilling) is a valuable and much needed compilation of facts. In Britain, the Laws governing the exhibition of uncensored films are so complicated and so manifestly unfair that the mere documentation of them will serve to strengthen the demand for their revision.

The pitfalls in the path of anyone who seeks to give performances of worth-while films which have not secured the approval of the Board of Censors are almost without number. Whereas a theatrical performance not licensed by the Lord Chamberlain can be given privately without hindrance, an uncensored film cannot be shown, even privately, in any Cinema without the express sanction of the local licensing authority, and such permission, especially in London, is extraordinarily difficult to secure.

Incidentally, it is worth recalling that the London Film Society, which has been instrumental in exhibiting a number of productions which otherwise would probably never have been shown at all, only secured permission to exist from the London County Council by a majority of six votes.

The Board of Censors, to whose decisions all the local authorities adhere, is, on the surface, an unofficial body, appointed and supported by the Trade. But, as the author of the pamphlet points out, the Board is distinctly susceptible to the wishes of the Government. *Dawn* was a case in point. So was *Mother*; in the case of this film the President of the Board of Censors expressed the view that while he had no particular objection to its presentation, "He could not

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disguise from himself that his own view was not shared by many members of the population, nor by the Government". (How *Potemkin* received the perfectly illegal attention of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard is well known).

For the individual who wishes to give public performances of uncensored films, the only way out of the impasse, under the existing Laws, is to obtain non-flam copies of the films, and hire premises which do not hold a cinematograph license. But his troubles will not end there. If he wants to accompany the films with music (as, of course, he will) he must apply for a music license, which can be refused. In this event he can give only one public performance; additional performances must be in private.

No sooner has our high-minded individual got over these little snags than he comes up against the 1927 Quota Act, which lays it down that if his performances are not entirely private he must arrange to shew a certain proportion of British films!

Enough has been written to indicate the monstrous and crippling effects of the existing Laws. It is intolerable that such conditions, conditions that apply to no other Art, should prevail, but prevail they do, and Ivor Montague is justified in suggesting that every loophole afforded by the Laws should be exploited in order to demonstrate practically the stupidity of the whole business.

R. BOND.

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"LUIS TRENKER ERZÄHLT"

Verlag "Filmkünstler und Filmkunst", Berlin W 30.
(RM 0.80).

The first volume of a series of film-booklets has been recently published by the editors of "Filmkünstler und Filmkunst," "Luis Trenker erzählt" is the title of it. Luis Trenker, a German actor well known for his mountain films tells us about the interesting expedition to the ice-sea in the far north, where the Hom-Film *Der Ruf des Nordens* was turned. It was not an easy task for all of them who took part in the expedition: heavy storms, piercingly cold temperatures, icebergs. But as reward the wonderful midnight sun of Spitzbergen, the beautiful and serene atmosphere of the lonely ice-fields. Funny adventures too, of course, for instance, the fight with a beautiful polar-bear, who unfortunately always appeared in the moment when all the cameras would not work (a disaster well known to many a cameraman in similar exciting situations).

But nearly all the members of the expedition were brave and courageous and fulfilled their duty under the most difficult circumstances in their curious studio 10 degrees from the north-pole.

A short and well written sketch of the rather dramatic film *Der Ruf des Nordens*, a story of two rivals who search for a lost polar-expedition, and beautiful stills make up this cute little booklet.

TRUDE WEISS.

CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Editor of Close Up.

Sir,

I have just seen a very, almost unbelievably bad film, a fact that in itself is not perhaps surprising, but there are some points about this film which cause me much anxiety, by which I am completely nonplussed. I ask leave for space in your journal, therefore, in the hope that my mystification may be somewhat enlightened by one of your many readers.

The presentation of this very bad film was attended by a large audience, composed of the gentlemen of the press and those very important people, the exhibitors, who brought their friends and their wives. Now during the unfolding of this film, at times indicated by themselves, these persons broke out into bursts of unstinted praise and admiration and clapping and such things that indicate pleasure, instigated by the scenes they were observing on the screen and the sounds to which they were listening.

I herewith would like to be made acquainted with the secret of their enjoyment, so that I, too, may laugh and clap and applaud. I feel that I am missing something which is good, that is too subtle for my weak intelligence. So I have gone to some trouble, (for I am interested in these things) to tabulate my thoughts on this very bad film, so that they can be compared with those of these other persons.

* * *

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The Theme.

A story, adapted from an Eden Philpotts novel set in the days of the Napoleonic Wars; a story of a pretty lady, a curly-headed hero, a dark-haired villain, (there is no end to't), and a money-borrowing father. There are prisoners, sailors, soldiers, lots of villagers, a witch, a captain, etc., etc. A conventional story, with plenty of action, *not* entirely without cinematic properties.

The Scenario.

There is no apparent scenario-organisation. No continuity; no balance of incident; no design; no construction. The dialogue is without wit, fire, imagination, or repartee. Sentences trail off into third rate banalities¹⁹ worse than Elephant and Castle. The scenarist is one who has been "at it" for years.

The Direction.

Straightforward in all senses. Old fashioned, probably just post-war school. *The Glorious Adventure* was better. Every shot taken from the same level. Incident considered of more importance than individuals. No atmosphere, no subtlety of presentation, all dramatic content approached from the same point of view. Almost complete ignorance of such methods of dramatic expression as camera angle, panning, travelling shots, pictorial composition, movement of players, etc., etc.

The Acting.

Negligible. Very bad make-ups and melodramatic acting. The leading lady *can* act if necessary, for she has been seen under other direction.

CLOSE UP

The Camerawork.

Undistinguished. Interior lighting of the all-over variety ; exteriors poor, with no attention given to the wonderful possible landscapes of Dartmoor. Some jerky panning in one place, overlooked because of small mercies. Many opportunities lost, such as 'the prison vaults,' the prison market. The cameraman says he photographed *Ben Hur*.

The Design.

Architecture on the whole good, but unrevealed by narrow-minded direction. Little scope for imagination, but where opportunities arise, they have been taken. The costumes are appalling in every sense. The period offers much scope, but it is to little avail. Practically no attention is paid to the delightful hairdressing of the date. No feeling of form or line or tone values.

Assemblage.

No regard given to length of shot or sequence. Time-lapses between one sequence and another conveyed by black screen. Complete loss of continuity and latent dramatic content resulting. No use made of dissolves or mixes. No variety of cutting. The whole disjointed and unpleasantly uneven.

The Recording.

Quite good of its kind.

Conclusions.

One is left at a loss, for one does not mean to be unkind to the people who made this film. One is only sorry for

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them that they ever started. It can only be said, that of the resources of the cinema they know nothing. Of the use of the film for dramatic expression of a fiction-story in order to give *entertainment*, they are unaware. Either they have never seen a film in their lives, which is unlikely, or they are hopelessly incompetent. They obviously have no idea of film psychology, camera angle, editing, cutting, pictorial composition, symbolism, indirect suggestion, continuity, style, form, etc., etc.

It is a pity, for it is things like this that get the film a bad name in England. Particularly when it is made there.

I am, sir, still anxious to know why those persons applauded, so, that I, too, can shout "More . . . more . . . please, it's great the greatest ever"

Yours, etc.,

"Average Filmgoer."

HOLLYWOOD NOTES.

Devil May Care is to be Ramon Novarro's first talking picture. The story, which is laid in France during the period of Napoleon's first exile, provides for the introduction of a number of songs. All of these have been especially written for the film and will be sung by Novarro, who is credited with an excellent operatic voice. (Credit is right.)

CLOSE UP

The Pagan has shown up the great big overdraft. Ed.) The picture is being directed by Sydney Franklin for M-G-M.

* * *

Berthold Viertel, as director, with a company of Fox players headed by Paul Muni, and accompanied by movie-tone equipment and technicians, recently repaired to France to secure some scenes at the Chantilly race course for incorporation in *Seven Faces*. Upon their return to Hollywood it was discovered that not sufficient shots had been taken. Accordingly a duplicate of the race course was built on one of the big studio lots and the necessary additional scenes thus obtained. If it be asked why this was not done in the first place and the expense of a trip abroad avoided, the answer is simply, that that is the way Hollywood does things.

* * *

King Vidor's next picture for M-G-M will be *Dulcy*. This is a wide departure from his *Hallelujah*; being a smart comedy of social and political life. The featured player is the mimetic comedienne, Marion Davies.

* * *

The Swan will be Lillian Gish's first appearance on the talking screen. This Molnar play was selected for Miss Gish only after an intensive search for a suitable vehicle for her; one offering a departure from her traditional type of rôles and at the same time providing a characterization in harmony with her distinctive personality. United Artists feel that in the rôle of the princess in this drama the desired object has been attained. The picture is being directed by

CLOSE UP

Paul Stein, and the supporting cast includes Conrad Nagel, Rod La Rocque, and Marie Dressler.

* * *

Scarcely a month passes that some company does not announce the building of the largest set ever erected on a motion-picture stage. The latest to claim this distinction is Paramount-Lasky. The palace garden set for their all-color musical romance, *The Vagabond King*, is declared to occupy 18,750 square feet, with a painted sky backing of fifteen thousand square feet. The set requires three hundred and ninety lights for its illumination.

* * *

As a rival to this Paramount-Lasky immensity, Warner Brothers are announcing that their forthcoming mammoth production, *Show of Shows*, is employing enough curtain and drape material, consisting largely of velours and gold and silver cloth, to cover four acres. By way of impressive illustration, it is stated that if the bolts from which this material was drawn had been placed end to end they would cover a distance of over ten miles. Furthermore, allowing three yards as the average amount of goods required for a woman's dress, fifty-four thousand women could each have one dress from the fabric used in the *Show of Shows*. While this has not the slightest bearing on the merit of the picture as a picture, it offers an interesting and significant illustration of the artifices employed by Hollywood for enlisting the attention and the interest of the public, in its productions.

* * *

Songs and theme music for Universal pictures are hereafter to be selected by vote of a special committee. This

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committee will consist of a representative of every department of the giant studio, from the common labourer to the highest executive. The committee will meet once a week, to pass upon original songs and music submitted by the general director of music, David Broekman. Because of its diversified personnel, it is believed that this committee will fairly represent a cross section of the general public, and that their selections will accordingly be in consonance with popular taste.

* * *

The Hurdy Gurdy Man is William K. Howard's forthcoming movietone picture for Fox. As a setting for this production a complete Italian village, bordered by vineyards, was constructed near Montrose, California. The picture is starring George Jessel.

* * *

United Artists are the latest producers to undertake a musical extravaganza. The tremendous popularity of M-G-M's *Hollywood Revue* and Fox's *Movietone Follies* has inspired the undertaking of like ventures by all of the big studios. Fanny Brice, the popular stage comedienne, will have the leading part in United Artists' production, which is starting on its way under the working title of *The Champ*.

* * *

Isle of Escape, a stirring adventure story of the Malaynesian Islands, is under way by Warner Brothers. Monte Blue has the leading rôle. Unlike his former picture of this type—*White Shadows in the South Seas*—this film is not being made against the actual backgrounds of the

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story, but on the Warner Brothers ranch near Hollywood. Here, amid natural, resemblant scenery, a head-hunters' village has been constructed, as well as a white settlement typical of the tropical isles. Hollywood Hawaiians are employed in the rôle of natives.

* * *

In Paramount-Lasky's *Behind the Make-up*, talkie enthusiasts throughout the world will be permitted to go on the forbidden sound stages and see how talking pictures are made. For the first time since the inauguration of talking pictures, the operations carried on behind closed and guarded doors will be made public. Devotees of the cinema will see the warning red lights, the suspended microphones, the prop boys and the electricians at work, the script girls, and the directors giving their silent signals, with the camera men encased in their sound-proof boxes. The story relates the experiences of a young man seeking and eventually finding a job in the Hollywood movies.

* * *

The Halperin Brothers, of Tech-Art Studios, are filming a fantastic paleontological picture under the title of *Creation*. The chief actors will be the monster prehistoric reptiles—brontosaurus, pterodactyls, triceratops, and their various uncouth relatives. These creatures will not only be built life size and made to move about, but will also be provided with voices and such sounds and cries as imagination can devise for them. The picture will resemble in general character the film made from Conan Doyle's story, *The Lost World*, which was produced several years ago and created no little interest because of its novelty and ingenuity. C. H.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WORKERS' FILM SOCIETIES.

In order to bring Russian and other working-class films to audiences that cannot afford Film Society fees, and generally to arouse working-class interest in films of special importance, it is proposed to form a number of Workers' Film Societies in industrial areas. A London society will be the first to operate (first show November 17th), but correspondents have been found in Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow, who are prepared to form local societies on the same lines. People in other towns are being approached.

Preparations for the supply of films, mainly Russian, are in hand, and no difficulty is anticipated in making up programmes of useful films passed by the Censor, even if difficulties arise in connection with uncensored films.

In order to develop the scheme, a central office is necessary, (the National Association), and a National Council. The National Council will have very little work to do, as each local society will have its own Committee; but the Secretary of the National Council will help in the formation of local societies, arrange or suggest programmes, etc. As the scheme develops, the central office will be financed by the local societies; but for the first six months a central fund must be raised. Some has already been promised, and as soon as a provisional council is formed a wider appeal can be made.

Draft rules for the national association and for the local societies are being worked out and will be circulated later.

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THE FILM GUILD OF LONDON: AIMS AND EXPERIMENTS.

The films we have shown are all the work of Members of the Film Guild. Amateurs working under all sorts of difficulties. Of Time—we all earn our livings 5½ days of the week and try to snatch from the rest as much as we can to experiment with films. Difficulties of Space—in the case of *Waitress*, the interiors were done in a low basement of a cafe “equipped” with four antique Klieg arc lamps, that spluttered and extinguished at odd and unexpected intervals! The editing, cutting and splicing of films done in odd rooms of private houses (often under fire from the family) have cost hours of beauty sleep, but we think they’re worth it!

We regard our efforts purely as experiments—exercises in the study of the most complex of all arts—the cinema. The making of these productions has taught us very much indeed, has developed individualities and discovered unexpected talents in all branches, and weaknesses as well! But now we are conscious of them and that’s the way to elimination.

Our efforts are now tending more in the direction of the unacted non-theatrical film, for therein are no limitations of persons, space or time. The film of actuality can be made by a single person or by the co-operated efforts of thousands. And wherever the amateur has his cine-camera *there* will he find the raw material for a film study or an epic. And **THEREIN WE ARE BEGINNING TO REALISE IS THE FUTURE OF THE AMATEUR AS ARTIST.**

Neurasthenia. Sovkino. Culture Film. Professor Suchareoski.

Men of the Wood. Sovkino. Document of an Expedition to North West Siberia.

By a lucky chance and thanks to the courtesy of the Sovkino agents in Berlin, I was able to see both these films on the same morning. They afford an interesting comparison because they show two utterly different ways of living and because they are typical of the thoroughness in which Russia is making films of every branch of scientific investigation.

The first was made to show the causes and effect of Neurasthenia and the necessity of having it cured as soon as possible in the Soviet Institution for that purpose. Not a very promising theme. But Professor Suchareoski has made a most exciting film. I particularly liked the jagged-cutting of the opening pictures of hectic traffic in Moscow, and the chaotic life of an overcrowded office. The patient is the head of some department. Incessant noise, incessant cigarettes, drugs and patent medicines, but no sleep. You begin to feel on edge yourself. Finally he comes to the institute where after treatment of baths and dietetics he is completely cured. When he is being examined we see diagrams of sound and unsound reflex and nerve actions. They are all that a diagram should be, simple, explicit and complete. Professor Suchareoski who told me that he is completely satisfied with the film has made a short film of real distinction. He is a master of 'Physiology without tears.'

The *Men of the Wood* are a Mongol tribe, in number

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about a thousand, which was until a few months ago, entirely unknown. The film is a document of their life, made by two young explorers, A. Litvinoff and C. Arsenjeff.

The photography is clear and the cutting shrewd, but not sufficiently rapid. You can't really criticise a film like that. Only after the six reels you feel that what you don't personally know about the tribe is not knowledge. The mountains and woods, hunting and fishing are magnificent. The fight with the bear is simply terrific; probably rather "stark" for an English audience, and the native dancers are suitably mysterious. For a geographical or Ethnological society the film is a godsend, and like all the Russian culture films, it is easy to obtain, even in England.

ANDREW WORDSWORTH.

Achtung, Liebe—Lebensgefahr (Where's Love There's Danger).

Erno Metzner's new film for Mr. Bob Stoll of Stoll-Film, was shown to us in Berlin. Mr. Metzner himself told us: "I like to make such a film once, but not more than once." It is a sensation film of motor racing, and those who have seen *Uberfall* will be able to visualise the method by which the thrill and terror of speed are conveyed to the spectator. We would hint, however, that to us the *real* sensation of the film was Grace Chiang. Words would be inadequate to describe the astonishing artistry of this new-comer to the screen. Her manner has been likened to that of Lillian Gish, and, indeed, it is possible to detect similarities, not

so much in method as in mannerism. One might say of Miss Gish that her method is a little too mannerised—or better still perhaps, her mannerism a little too methodical. At least it is apt to be if you have seen her many times. There is a too deliberate whimsicality perhaps, a kind of insistence on porcelain delicacy, some piece of Meissen, with the eternal threat of porcelain that it can be so easily broken. Grace Chiang goes beyond this. She is less capturable, less static. There is always a something behind the something that you see. She is like blue smoke, and not to be broken, as Miss Gish insists she is to be, but blown away, and nobody would ever know quite where.

You feel she was not meant to steal the picture, but steal it she does. The arch concessions of Anna May Wong are shown up at their true value. Musk, snake-hips, almond eyes. Grace Chiang could go among the Asta Nielsens, for her ability of expression has that purity that lacks all callowness or cant, to be found only among the chosen few.

The story as a thriller, does thrill. Not sustainedly perhaps. Mr. Bob Stoll acts a dual rôle, and if he is a little too obvious as the villain of the piece, he is winning enough as the hero. There is one terrific accident that makes the heart leap into the mouth—a little masterpiece of cinema craft. As we have said, those who have seen, and will see *Überfall*, will be able to conceive what happens to us when this frightful, shrieking, flaming mass catapults into our very midst!

Frau im Mond (The Girl in the Moon).

Fritz Lang's film had quite an amazing reception at its

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premiere. Mr. H. G. Wells described *Metropolis* as the world's silliest film, and this is another. But, like *Metropolis*, if you accept the Jules Verne aspect, there is considerable entertainment to be drawn from it. The most curious thing about Lang is his utter inability to progress. The technique of his first film is the technique he uses to-day. We still have the same strutting instead of acting, the same wide-flung, over-emphatic gesture, the same mammoth ponderousness.

There are some excellent sequences, as there always are; some magnificent photography, as there always is; and an absence of all logic that would be perfectly baffling if it had not always been the same!

Quite the best scenes are those preparatory to the rocket leaving for the Moon. Crowds, searchlights, radio. The giant missile, sleek and polished, slowly wheeled from its hangar. And, here an excellent technical idea, maintained in equilibrium by partial immersion in a giant tank of water. This, being pre-supposed, as a necessity for controlling the send-off. Suspense is easily gained here, for this much of it is credible, possible, and the massive, portentous style of Lang well suited to the massiveness of the subject.

A roar and the comet is off. Cheers greeted this at the premiere, and indeed, it was very good. Then we are switched to the interior of the rocket, a rather lovely thing, so brightly polished and decorative. Gasping for breath brings them all to death's door until the world's atmosphere with its gravitational pull are passed. And now, in the realm of pure imagination, imagination is not so pure after all. When liquid poured out, floats in bubbles that can be

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caught in the hand and rebottled, it is a small thing and delights us. But when at the approach to the moon the ship trembles so that no one can stand up, why does every fixture, every spring, the blankets on the beds, remain as still as the air before a cyclone?

But these are not the questions it is necessary to ask. We don't ask to be credulous. But we might have asked for more imaginative treatment of the lunar landscape. Here, if anywhere, was opportunity for sublime grotesqueness of decor. The only thing that came near it was the vicious lake of solfaturas. Backgrounds had large labels "Studio Prop," pasted all over them.

However, great praise or great damnation would count little. Everybody will want to see the film, and they should certainly do so.

* * *

French Season.

Mr. Stuart Davis has done a very wise and a very clever thing in his arrangement of a French season, which is now having so great a success at the Avenue Pavillon. An arrangement of national seasons is quite obviously the most clear and orderly manner not only to help film students to comprehend the salient characteristics of film consciousness in different nations, but to bring the public to an understanding of methods consistently different from the methods to which they are accustomed—an understanding that could not possibly be arrived at through casual mixing of programmes. Congratulations must go to Mr. Davis for his astuteness of taste, and his cleverness in obtaining so satisfactorily a representative collection from the significant

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artistic productions of that country. The organisation of such a scheme is more than simple hard work; it needs devotion and punctiliousness. This significant Season has come about without any "blah" or beating of drums—a testimony to its soundness. There is none of the pious ostentation that can be found among groups in Europe and America noteworthy, alas, less for their artistic invariability than their assumption of it! The French Season comes from orderly and conscientious interest. We hope sincerely that it will be the first of a series of equally successful national seasons of the same representative impeccability.

G. W. Pabst is at work on a scenario for a war-film which promises to be of great interest. It will be throughout a sound film, and will embody the three different points of view of war-time Germany, France and Great Britain. The French episodes will be based on a work by Barbusse, and it is probable that the English will be taken from a play by Miles Malleson. Each nation will speak in its own language. It is said that it will have a strong anti-war appeal.

* * *

Owing to a misunderstanding, the film *Light and Shade* described in last month's *Close Up* was ascribed to Gussy Lauwson, the Belgian director who has made a film of that name. That alluded to was the *Light and Shade* of S. Sandy, which will be shown at the Avenue Pavilion during the French Season.

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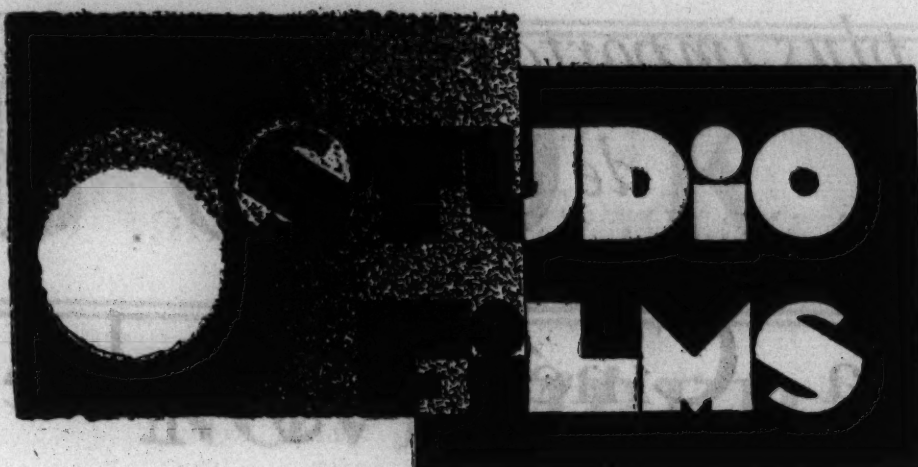
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